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October 11, 1881.

Vol. IX.

Single
Number.

PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY BEADLE AND ADAMS,
No. 98 WILLIAM STREET, NEW YORK.

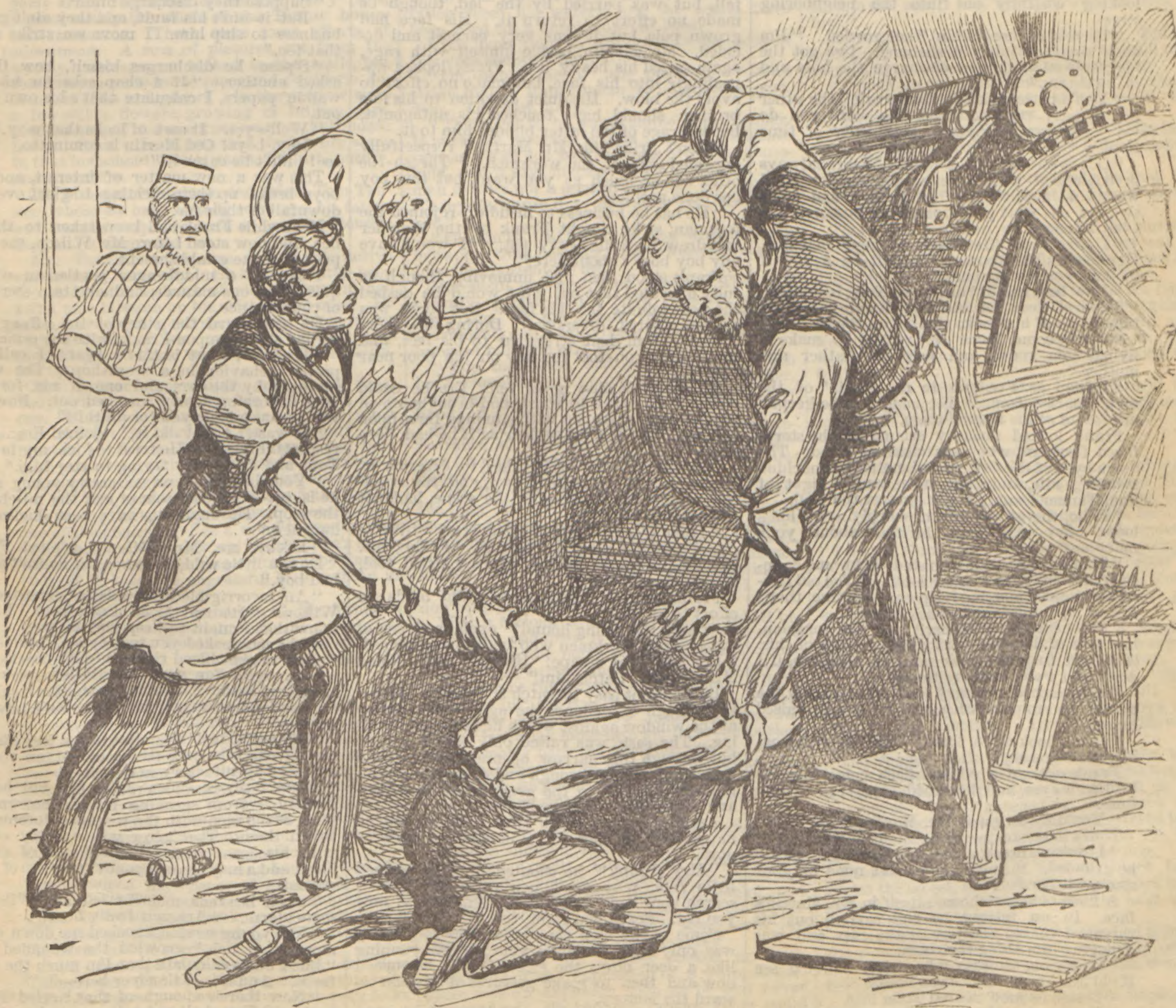
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No. 220.

Tom Tanner, Scalawag and Scapegrace; or, The Black Sheep of the Flock.

BY CHARLES MORRIS,

AUTHOR OF "BOB ROCKETT, THE BANK RUNNER," "BOB ROCKETT, THE BOY DODGER," "WILL WILDFIRE," "DARK PAUL," ETC., ETC.



FRANK, WITH HIS FACE FULL OF CONCERN, HAD SPRUNG FROM HIS POST, AND WAS NOW TRYING TO DRAG BACK THE YOUNG SAVAGE.

Tom Tanner, Scalawag and Scapegrace;

OR,

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PAUL," "DASHING DAVE," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A ROW AND A DISCHARGE.

IT was a beautiful day outside, and it seemed hard to be confined among whirling wheels and rattling machines, in a close, smoky and grimy room, while a ray of sunshine hardly dared to enter, for fear it might be seized upon by those iron fingers and wrought into some unheard-of shape.

Yet this room was full of men and boys, who gave scarcely a thought to the sunshine, so busy were they over their work. Like hungry creatures the machines greedily devoured the iron plates that were rapidly fed to them, and let them fall again in a shower of useful forms. And the workmen themselves seemed machines, so steady and regular were all their movements.

Not all, however. In a corner of the room were two boys, very much alike in face, but very different in their habits. One was quietly and steadily feeding the narrow iron plates to his machine, with the regularity of clock-work. The other was leaning lazily against the wall, with his elbow on the window-sill, and looking wistfully out into the neighboring street.

"There's no use talkin'," he growled. "I'm dead tired of this old shebang. I've got the biggest notion out to discharge the boss and make tracks."

"You'd better stick to your work," the other boy quietly replied. "All the work you do won't hurt you, and you've got plenty of time to play."

"Oo! you dry up, Frank. You're always preachin'. I wasn't never got up for hard work, and I ain't goin' to hang round here, swiping out steel pels, for all the bosses as was ever heard on."

"Hush, Tom! Get back to your machine. Here comes Mr. Martin. There'll be a row if he finds you loafing here."

"Row be frizzled!" answered Tom, recklessly. "S'pose I keer fer old Joe Martin? I won't take much of his slack, you bet on that."

"Come, come, Tom! We've got to make a living, you know, and help our father and mother."

"Dunno as I've got to do nothin' of the sort," snarled Tom. "They ought to be keepin' me, 'stead of me keepin' them."

Frank looked uneasily around at the stern-faced foreman, who was close at hand. The quick eyes of the latter had noticed a machine standing idle, and they now caught sight of Tom Tanner leaning lazily against the wall.

"Hillo, there!" he cried, sharply. "What's loose, boy? Anything bu'sted about your machine?"

"There's somethin' bu'sted 'bout me," answered Tom, with a saucy look. "The old concern's right enough, I s'pose. It's me that's sick of it; 'tain't it that's sick of me."

"See here, Tom Tanner," said the foreman, in a tone of decision. "I've had enough of this. Get back to your work now, or, hang me, if I don't carry you back by the ears!"

Tom returned an angry look, but he knew the man he had to deal with, and he slowly raised himself.

"Come, look alive, there! Stir up, will you, Mr. Slow-go-easy?"

Frank noticed a wicked flash come into his brother's eyes, and hastened to say, in a mild tone:

"You'd better mind Mr. Martin, Tom."

Tom's hasty temper flamed out at this.

"I ain't no dog for old Joe Martin to kick," he growled. "And I don't want none of your slack, neither."

A flush of anger showed itself in Mr. Martin's face. In an instant he had carried out his threat of taking the boy by the ears, and was dragging him along the room.

"Come on, Smarty," he cried. "We'll see if old Joe Martin isn't boss here."

"Let go of me!" roared Tom.

"Not much. Not till I take some of the impudence out of you."

But he counted too much on his own strength. In an instant the boy turned, and ferociously buried his sharp teeth in the man's arm. The latter, with a cry of pain, released him, and struck him a blow that leveled him to the floor.

But Tom was quick as a cat. The next instant he was upon his hands and knees, and had sunk his teeth in the foreman's leg, with a fierce bite that made him yell with agony.

Frank, with his face full of concern, had sprung from his post, and was now trying to drag back the young savage.

"Don't hurt him, Mr. Martin," he appealed. "Oh, don't hurt him! Let me; I will quiet him. You were too hard on him, you know."

He tugged away as he spoke, and dragged Tom loose from his foe.

A harsh oath broke from the man's lips. Heedless of this appeal, he dealt Tom a violent blow that knocked him prostrate. Burning with rage, he ran forward, and raised his foot with the intent to bring his heavy boot down upon the helpless boy.

"Don't do that!" cried Frank, respectfully, but decidedly, pushing between the combatants. "He is my brother, Mr. Martin. You must not hurt him."

"Get out, you young viper!" snarled the foreman, endeavoring to push him away.

"No, no," answered Frank, keeping his place. "Oh! won't you let him go this time, Mr. Martin? He won't be saucy again."

"No, drat him!" growled the foreman, as he caught Frank's shoulder and gave him a fierce jerk.

Frank was a well-built and well-grown boy, and he resisted this effort, a look of anger coming into his earnest face. The infuriated foreman doubled his fist to strike him. The blow fell, but was parried by the lad, though he made no effort to return it. His face had grown pale, but it was very earnest and decided. Mr. Martin, beside himself with rage, again raised his heavy fist. Frank looked appealingly into his face, but made no effort to avoid the blow. His quiet devotion to his idle brother should have touched his antagonist, but the rage of the latter blinded him to it.

"Don't strike him, Mr. Martin," respectfully appealed one of the workmen. "Thrash the other one as much as you want, but this boy has done nothing."

"He has no business to meddle," rejoined the foreman, as he caught Frank by the shoulder and drew back his heavy fist. "I won't have any boy bosses about here."

Frank stood firm and unmoving, though he fully expected that burly fist would be dashed the next minute into his face. But there was an unexpected diversion. During this short colloquy Tom had struggled to his feet, and grasped an iron tool that lay on the floor near him.

Mr. Martin's blow never fell. Ere he could strike, Tom leaped forward, and brought down the dangerous weapon with stunning force upon his head. He fell to the floor as if he had been shot.

This affray, long as it takes to describe it, had lasted but a minute or two, and the workmen, who were flocking to the scene, had not had time to interfere.

"Make tracks, Frank!" cried Tom. "We've raised thunder now, for certain. Follow me. Don't stand there dreamin' like a blasted fool, as you always was!"

Frank seemed indeed dazed, and made no effort to move.

"Catch the young hound!" exclaimed one of the group of workmen who had now gathered. "Don't let him escape! He may have killed Mr. Martin! Catch him!"

But it is not easy to catch a weasel. With a shrill laugh of defiance the agile youth sprang at the window against which he had been standing. The sash was raised only about a foot, but through this narrow opening he shot like a lizard, squirming through and dropping like an india-rubber ball to the ground outside before any of the men could reach him.

Another defiant laugh came from the boy as he showed his face for a moment at the window.

"Hey, Frank!" he shouted. "You blamed little fool, why don't you run? Old Joe'll scorch your back well if he gets a chance, now you bet. Serve you right, too."

Some of the men ran to the window, but it was only to see the agile young rogue running like a deer down the street, while he turned now and then to make gestures of disdain toward the factory.

It was a striking group which remained within the room. On the floor lay the insensible

foreman, the blood slowly reddening his hair, from the wound he had received. Near him stood Frank's erect figure, the disheveled hair falling over his pale and earnest face. Close by was the group of workmen, some angrily regarding him; others with looks of sympathy. And regardless of all this the wheels and levers rattled and throbbed, roared and clanked, with a double vigor now that they were relieved from work.

"Snatch the other one!" cried a workman. "They have killed Mr. Martin between them."

"No, no," replied another. "This boy is not to blame. Everybody knows he is the best boy in the shop."

"Keep a stiff upper lip, Frank," whispered one of the boys who had approached him. "All us boys think it served old Martin right."

"Take him to the office," suggested an intelligent-looking workman. "Let Mr. Wilson decide. And some of you look after Martin. He is only stunned. He is two thick-skulled to be easily hurt!"

This suggestion was at once carried out. Two of the men led the unresisting lad toward the office, while others examined the condition of the prostrate foreman.

It was soon evident he had received only a scalp wound, and a deep groan, as they turned him over, gave signs of returning animation.

An indignation meeting was meanwhile being held among the boys. None of them could bear Tom, but Frank was a favorite with them all, and they were rather glad to think that old Martin had been paid off for some long scores of their own.

"I move we strike if they do anything to Frank Tanner," proposed one. "He's just the primest fellow out."

"Suppose they discharge him?"

"But it ain't his fault, and they ain't got no business to ship him. I move we strike ag'in' that too."

"S'pose he discharges hisself, how then?" asked another. "If a chap asks for his own walkin' papers, I calculate that's his own lookout."

"Well—yes. It sort of looks that way."

"Hey, boys! Old Martin is coming to. Law-see! didn't he catch it?"

This was a new matter of interest, and the boys broke up their meeting to gloat over the downfall of their foe.

Meanwhile Frank had been taken to the office, and now stood before Mr. Wilson, the proprietor of the establishment.

This was a middle-aged gentleman with a quick, nervous manner, and a certain sternness of countenance.

He had heard the story of the affray, and turned sharply upon Frank, with the remark:

"Well, sir, what is this I hear? I call this pretty behavior in a workshop. The whole place set by the ears and one of my foremen with his brains nearly knocked out. Now, sir, what excuse have you for all this?"

"It wasn't I that did it," rejoined Frank, in a respectful tone. "He tried to kick my brother Tom, and I was only trying to stop him."

"Your brother Tom! A pretty young rascal he is, too—at the bottom of half the mischief in the shop. He ought to have been kicked out long ago."

"Excuse me, Mr. Wilson," replied Frank. "He is a little wild, I know; but he isn't such a bad boy."

"An incorrigible little villain," persisted Mr. Wilson. "It's bad blood, I'm afraid. I don't know that I ought to keep you, either."

"I haven't asked you to keep me," blurted out Frank, the hot blood rising into his cheeks. "If we do work for you, Mr. Wilson, we're not slaves or dogs. You have no right to insult me; and, as for discharging me, you won't have the trouble."

"All right, my boy. But if you leave in that way, I will take care that you get no work in any other pen factory in the city."

A hot reply rose to Frank's lips, but he was prevented from speaking by the entrance of some of the men with the wounded foreman between them. The latter was a sorry object, with his face covered with stains of clotted blood and a most woe-begone expression of countenance.

"Good heavens, man!" cried Mr. Wilson in some alarm. "Are you badly hurt?"

"The young wretch knocked me down with a monkey-wrench," growled the wounded man. "But I don't calculate that I'm much the worse for it. And this little viper here—"

"Now there's enough of that," cried Frank, hotly. "You shall not call me such names if you were as big as all out of doors. Everybody

is wrong but you, of course. Everybody always is. But I've a notion that if Mr. Wilson knew all that the men think of you, he might change his opinion. That's all; but I'm no more a viper than you are."

A look of astonishment came upon the foreman's face at this unlooked-for plain speaking. With an angry oath he stepped forward.

"There, there, Martin!" cried Mr. Wilson, authoritatively. "That will do. We will let the quarrel rest there, for I do not know but that the boy has some reason in what he says."

Mr. Martin stepped back considerably abashed by this decisive command.

"Now, Mr. Wilson, if you will pay me off I will leave," said Frank quietly.

"No, no, there's no occasion for that, my boy," replied Mr. Wilson, in a more kindly tone. "I fancy you are not so much in fault. You can go back to your work."

"Thank you," rejoined Frank, "but not in a shop where that man is foreman. You can't spare him, I suppose; but you can spare me. So you will please pay me off, sir."

In five minutes more Frank stepped into the street, a boy without an occupation.

CHAPTER II.

A LITTLE DOMESTIC DIFFICULTY.

THE Tanner family did not live on Fifth Avenue. They were not quite so high-toned as that. It is true their mansion was an extensive one, but it was a little too extensive for them, so they kindly let about a hundred other families occupy portions of it. It was, in fact, a tenement house, in which they thought themselves rich to occupy two rooms, and these not very spacious, nor very luxuriously furnished.

A very plain table, three or four hard-backed chairs, a dilapidated cooking stove, and a beggarly array of cracked dishes and rusty pans, formed nearly the whole of the Tanner household treasures. There were some efforts at adornment. A row of pictures, cut from the weekly papers, were tacked to the walls, but these ran more to horse races and pugilistic encounters than to high art. In the window were a few sickly flowers, growing in broken jars. And on a shelf in one corner were a half-dozen books. So it was evident that there were some in that household with a taste for art, nature, and literature.

The inmates of the room comprised Tom Tanner, whom we have already seen, and his father and mother, together with a bony rat-terrier dog, and a sleepy old cat.

Mr. Tanner, senior, was not an attractive specimen of humanity. He had evidently been too fond of the extract of old rye, and it had left a ripe blossom on his aristocratic nose. He must have been quarrelsome, too, when in his cups, for one of his eyes was now in deep mourning, and there was an ugly cut on his under lip.

Mrs. Tanner was a little, mild-faced, quiet body, with a look as if her life had been a hard one. Her whole comfort in life had been in her son Frank. As for Tom he was only half brother to Frank, for Mr. Tanner had been married twice, and the older boy had quite a different mother from this mild little woman.

"It's too confounded ridik'lous," the father was saying, as he rocked himself uneasily upon one of the chairs. "I've a mind to wallop that boy Frank. Blame his ugly pictur', he's allers a-makin' trouble. And me a-workin' my fingers' ends off to keep the ongrateful little willian in vittles and clothes."

It was one of the romances of Mr. Tanner's life that he was a very industrious member of the working classes. But the truth was he wrestled with the whisky bottle more than with the blacksmith's hammer and tongs.

"I couldn't help it," broke in Tom, who was sprawling at full length on the floor. "He just always gits me discharged. I wa n't a-goin' to kick up no row with old Martin; but Frank, he had to put in his jaw, and the first thing you know, dad, there was the skippiest old mill. Martin salted me on the lip, and then he giv me a persuader over the eye. But Frank, he never gits hurt. He's jist death at stirrin' up fights, and warpin' me into them. But he looks out fur his pretty face, you bet."

"Yes, the ongrateful young hound!" and Mr. Tanner wiped his eyes as if affected to tears. "I've the blamedest notion to wallop him. I s'pose he'll jist walk back to his work like a cur, arter gettin' my poor boy Tom into trouble. He never had no spirit."

"He has spirit enough," broke in Mrs. Tanner, who had been fuming during this talk. "But he knows we have to live, and poor folks have a great deal to put up with."

"Shut up, woman!" snarled her husband. "He ain't got no spirit, I say. Look at my boy Tom, here. Nobody don't crow over him."

"Nor his father either," was the little woman's stinging retort. "You are both of you very ready for an excuse to get out of work."

It was not often that she was stung to a sharp answer. Mr. Tanner looked at her in amazement. Tom, who had been annoying the cat, now got up, and whistling for the dog, left the room. He did not like domestic scenes, particularly where his industry was called in question.

Mr. Tanner stopped rocking his chair, and cast a maudlin look toward his wife.

"Yer allers at it," he growled. "Yer allers a-diggin' at me and Tom. 'Stead of symper thizin' with me, arter I tumbled off the curbstone last night and bunged my face all up, it's jist nothin' but growl, growl, growl. I tell you what, wife, I'm about tired on 't."

"If you had been at your work, Jacob Tanner," she retorted, "you would not have been on those slippery curbstones. I am afraid you fell against some other drunken loafer's fist."

"That's an insinuation, woman," hiccuped Jacob. "That's a doosed insinuation. You've been a-heapin' it on me, and a-pilin' it on me, and insinuwatin' ag'in' me, and blame me if I'm a-goin' to stand it any longer. It's mighty little comfort an honest workin' man gits outer sich a family as I've got. You've got old Sam in you, Mrs. Tanner, and it's 'bout time he was took out."

He rose unsteadily to his feet, with a moist look in his eye. His wife retreated into a corner, and held up her arms feebly in defense. She knew what was meant when he was so polite as to call her Mrs. Tanner. If a tear had fallen from his watery eye she would have been good for a knock-down at least.

"It's 'bout time to settle who's the boss of this yere shanty," he continued.

"Oh, don't, Jacob!" she pleaded. "Don't strike me! I didn't mean to aggravate you, dear. Oh, now don't!"

"There's got to be an example, Mrs. Tanner. It hurts me wuss nor it does you, but Scripture says as we've got to keep peace in the household, and it says moreover as a grumblin' woman is wuss nor a serpent's tooth. So you see it's my Scripture duty to wallop you, Mrs. Tanner."

"Oh don't! Oh!" and the poor woman threw her apron over her face, and cowered down before that portentous fist.

Her shrill cry met ears outside. The door sharply opened, and a brisk footstep entered the room. In an instant there was an alert movement, and a tall young form pushed itself between husband and wife.

"You must not, and you shall not, touch her!" came an earnest cry. "Hit me, father. Pound me as much as you will. But keep your hands off of mother."

It was Frank Tanner who had made his appearance so opportunely. He stood erect before his angry parent, looking at him not defiantly, but firmly.

"So it's you, you young scorpion!" snarled the tipsy father. "It's you that's come here to meddle atween husband and wife! Ye ain't satersfied to git poor Tom licked and set adrift, but you must come here a-mixin' in. Blame me if I ain't a mind to whale yer rascally hide."

"Go ahead, father. I can stand it. But don't lay your hands on mother."

With a furious oath the angry man raised his heavy fist, and drew it back as if with intent to dash it into the noble young face before him. But to strike herself and to strike her son were two different things with Mrs. Tanner. All the motherly instinct rose in her. With a scream she threw herself on her husband's arm, she dashed her weak hand into his face, she pushed him violently back, he yielding like a reed in his amazement at this assault. She drove him before her until she had pushed him into his seat, and then stood with panting lips and flaming eyes before him.

"You cowardly brute!" she ejaculated, with a passion unusual with her. "Dare to touch him on your peril! You can get yourself filled with whisky, and can come here to abuse women and children, and that's all you're good for. You have ill treated that poor child ever since he was a baby, but you shall never lay hands on him again in my presence."

The amazed Mr. Tanner looked up with something of the expression of a whipped cur. Here was an explosion such as he had never dreamed of. He had not fancied there could

be so much vim in the little woman. His eyes furtively sought her indignant face, and then stole a glance at his son, who stood motionless as a statue, though his lips trembled with feeling.

Jacob Tanner was thoroughly cowed. Like all such domestic tyrants he was a coward at heart, and there was a whimpering sound in his voice as he again began to speak.

"I dunno what I've done, to kick up sich a row," he complained. "Jist you let me alone and I'll let you alone, and I've told you that of'n and of'n, wife. But ther' never was no use talkin' sense to a woman."

Mrs. Tanner looked at him for a moment with supreme contempt. Then with a sudden change of expression, and a gush of tears to her eyes, she turned to her son, and clasped him in her arms, raining kisses on his face.

"Never mind him, Frank. He's been drinkin'. He wouldn't behave so if he was sober," she appealed, with a natural instinct to excuse her husband. "Tell me all about it, my dear boy. Have you quit your work, like Tom?"

"I could not help it, mother. I could not work under that Mr. Martin, after what happened. Sit down and I will tell you all about it."

And he repeated the story which the reader already knows, while his father, with his head resting upon the table, rocked himself backward and forward, too much absorbed in his own domestic woes to attend to the boy's narrative.

"Has Tom been home, mother?"

"Yes. He has gone out, with the dog."

"He's gone to look fur work," grumbled the father. "Tom ain't the boy to lay on his oars. He's jist b'ilin' over with industry, is that boy. He ain't the idle chap as his ongrateful brother is, a-gittin' them both out of work, and then layin' adrift and 'specting work to float to him."

A keen flash shot into Frank's eyes. But he restrained himself, and the tone was mild and respectful in which he spoke to his mother.

"I must go out again now, mother. I cannot afford to be idle, you know; as long as—" He bit his lip and became silent.

"I must get work," he resumed. "Maybe I can get some for Tom, too. But I don't know. Work isn't very plenty jist now."

Kissing his mother affectionately he took his hat and walked out, without a glance at his maudlin father.

There was a group of boys in the narrow street into which Frank emerged. Tom was in their midst and was occupied in holding back his dog, which was eagerly trying to get loose.

"Hello, there's Frank!" cried one of the boys.

"Come here, Frank. There's the best fun going. Bill Bounce has caught a rat in his trap, and we're going to let it out and set Gip on it. Oh! won't he shake it! Hurry, Frank, afore the fun's over."

Frank felt something of a boy's natural impulse to see a dog shake a rat, but he had more important business just then, and declined the invitation.

"I haven't time," he answered.

"Oh, nonsense! It will only take a minute."

"Let him go, little stuck-up," sneered Tom.

"He's too goody to keer 'bout dogs and rats. We don't want no Sunday-school chaps here."

"Very well, Tom," answered Frank, quietly.

"I do not think I am any the worse for going to Sunday-school, and you might be the better for it. But I guess we won't talk about that now."

Frank walked on, whistling cheerfully, perhaps to drown an answer.

But Tom contented himself with a shrug of the shoulders and a meaning gesture toward his brother that set some of the boys laughing.

"Fetch along your rat now," he cried. "Gip's gittin' heavy to hold. Come ahead, Bill. Git out of the way there, some of you boys, and give Mr. Rat a chance. Lively now. This way, Bill."

The ragged little urchin who held the trap took it to the middle of the street and cautiously opened its door, Gip's eyes being fixed on the movement. The frightened rat drew back and hesitated about taking the liberty offered him. But a shake of the wire trap drove him out, and at the same instant Tom released the dog.

There was the flash of a small black body across the street, the flash of a larger black body in its wake, a bark, a squeal, and the loud clapping of the boys' hands.

It was all over with the rat. Gip had it in his sharp teeth and was shaking it violently, while the boys laughed and shouted as if this was the best bit of fun in the world.

And while the idle brother was thus employed,

the industrious brother was off on his long journey in search of work, with all the burden of the family on his young shoulders.

CHAPTER III.

GETTING INTO SITUATIONS.

"WANT work, eh?" and Mr. Thompson, of the firm of Thompson, Clark & Co., looked up over his spectacles. "Well, you're a spruce looking boy. What are you good for?"

"I am good to try most anything," answered Frank Tanner respectfully. "I haven't done any work in your line, but I am young and willing. I can learn."

Mr. Thompson shook his head as he continued to look at the boy.

"No, my lad," he said. "We are not in need of any students. We cannot take on anybody that does not know the business."

"But how is anybody to know it, sir, if you give no one a chance to learn?"

"He has you there," laughed Mr. Clark, looking up for a moment from his account book. "As the old blood dies out new blood must come in."

"That's it!" cried Frank eagerly. "I'm new blood, and good blood too. Just try me, sir, and you'll see if I ain't square up to the mark."

He looked wistfully at Mr. Thompson, as the latter silently surveyed him.

"Are you a good eater?" he asked, with a queer smile.

"I don't know," answered Frank. "I eat all I can get, but I don't often have a chance to eat all I want."

"How much can you lift?"

"I suppose I might fetch up a hundred and fifty pounds. I'm only a boy yet, you see."

"Can you hit a square blow?"

"I ain't much on the muscle," replied Frank modestly. "I generally get out of the way when I see a fight coming."

"But if you were insulted? If some other boy were to wipe his feet on you?"

Frank's eyes flashed and his hands involuntarily clinched.

"I'm afraid that boy's house would go down," he answered.

Mr. Thompson laughed. He looked comically across at his partner.

"The little man has grit in him," he said. "We might give him a chance."

Frank's face lighted up at this announcement.

"What is your name?"

"Frank Tanner, sir."

"Where do you live? But don't tell me, I'd be sure to forget. Write it down on this paper."

Frank wrote his name and residence in a neat, round hand, Mr. Thompson looking curiously on.

"You write a fair hand," he remarked.

"What say, Clark? Shall we give the lad a chance to learn the business?"

"Yes," rejoined Mr. Clark, glancing up from the book.

"Thank you, sir," said Frank, gratefully.

"But—" and he hesitated. "But, sir— I was going to ask—"

"Well? Out with it, boy. What were you going to ask?"

"About the wages, sir. It wasn't about the work. I ain't afraid of work. But how much will you pay me?"

Mr. Thompson looked sharply up.

"Pay, hey? We are going to teach you the business, boy. That's pay enough. You'll be more trouble than use to us for a year, and we should charge you something for taking you in hand. It isn't much fun licking young cubs into shape," he continued, looking over to Clark.

"However, you look like a smart boy, and we'll give you a chance. But we can't pay you for the first year."

"I'm sure I'm much obliged," answered poor Frank, in a faltering tone. "But I can't work without pay. I've got to help keep my father and mother, sir, or I wouldn't care. We're very poor."

"All right, my lad. That's very good in you," and Mr. Thompson's tone was so benevolent that Frank began to hope. "But we do not do business for charity, and cannot undertake to keep your father and mother. So I guess you will have to look further."

Mr. Clark looked quickly up, resting his pen-handle on his nose.

"I am very sorry—" began Frank.

"I suppose so," broke in Mr. Thompson, curtly. "But that's not business. We've given you all the time we can spare, my brisk little chap. Yes and no is business talk. You have

said no. And so—" he looked significantly at the door.

Frank took the hint and walked reluctantly away, with a very crestfallen look upon his face. Mr. Thompson turned again to the letter he had been writing, but Mr. Clark watched the boy's sorrowful passage through the store, still slowly scratching his nose with the end of his pen. He then turned to his partner, who seemed to have quite forgotten the boy's existence.

"See here, Thompson," cried Mr. Clark, sharply, "do you know that you're confoundedly cold-blooded?"

"Hey?" answered Thompson, looking up with a startled air.

"If you didn't want the boy, what was the use of your being so rascally short with him?"

"Oh! drop all that, Clark. Don't you be lug-ging sentiment into business. What in the sun have feelings to do in a counting-room?"

Mr. Clark seemed on the point of giving a sharp answer, but he restrained himself, and said:

"Very well. Let us drop sentiment then. But that was a live boy. It's my notion he's worth taking in hand, even if we have to pay him. Something could be made of him."

"Do you think we'd better make Lyons Brothers, of Belfast, another offer for those linens? Is there any money in them?"

A deep frown came upon Mr. Clark's brow.

"As you please," he answered shortly and turned to his accounts.

Mr. Thompson quietly picked up the address which Frank had written for him, thrust it into his vest pocket, and dashed again into the heart of his letter.

Meanwhile the subject of their conversation was walking up Broadway. He turned into store after store, letting scarcely one pass him. But it was the same tune in them all. "Don't want anybody." "Boys are more plague than profit." Or more kindly. "No, my lad, am sorry we have no opening." Or more curtly. "No."

Whatever the words they all came to the same. There was no room for Frank Tanner.

Somewhat discouraged he turned into Chatham street, and wandered along in front of clothing stores and other retail lines of business. Eager salesmen stood outside the doors, inviting every shabbily dressed passer, with the promise of a bargain.

"Why couldn't I do that?" Frank asked himself. "It may not be pleasant, but there's no disgrace in it. I suppose they wouldn't have boys, though."

He had just caught sight of a store, with a plentiful display of clothing in front, but without a salesman to descant on its merits. The thought struck him to try in there.

Without hesitation Frank plunged in. The proprietor, a sallow-faced, hook-nosed fellow, came briskly forward.

"Goot-mornin', my young frient. What can I do for you this mornin'? I can fit you mit a nice suit, and very cheap."

"I don't want a suit," answered Frank.

"Well, den, a nice cut-away coat. 'Jist come down this way. I fit you right off."

"No, no," cried Frank, escaping from his hands, as he was proceeding to measure him.

"I don't want a coat. I—I want a job."

"You want a job?" and the proprietor fell back in surprise.

"Yes," broke in Frank. "You haven't any barker out front. All the other stores have them. I'm only a boy, I know, but I can talk, and I'll come cheap. Just try me, Mr. Franks. I'll earn my wages."

"You're only a poy? And you'll come cheap?—Say, now, how you know my name's Franks?"

"I saw it on the sign at the door."

"Very goot. But I don't want no barker. They ain't no 'count."

"Just try me. I'll do my best."

"See here, poy," and Mr. Franks's nose curled cunningly. "You go out dere and fetch me in customers. For every one as puy I gives you ten cents; for every one as don't puy, I gives you not'ings. Is dat good?"

"Yes," cried Frank, eager for anything that looked like a chance to make money. "I will try it."

"When you try?"

"Now."

"Goot. Dat's business. You go right out front."

Within ten minutes from the time that Frank had entered the store he was installed as regular out-door salesman, and had taken his station upon the pavement, eagerly looking for some one who might seem as if he needed clothing.

While Frank was thus occupied his idle brother Tom was otherwise engaged. Gip had finally disposed of the rat, and the group of young vagabonds was lounging easily along the street, seeking some other game to occupy their inquiring minds.

The first bit of fun that came to them was in the shape of a well dressed child, who was walking heedfully along with a small pitcher of milk.

The ragged urchin who had trapped the rat managed to stumble against this child, and topple him over into the gutter, the fallen pitcher spreading a white blotch of milk upon the pavement.

The boys laughed as if this was the greatest fun in the world, but Tom Tanner, with a great show of kindness, picked up the crying child, and affected to smooth down his muddy clothes. He then wiped his well-soiled hands over the little fellow's face, until, what with mud and tears, he presented a very sorry aspect.

"Don't cry, little pretty," solaced Tom. "It's mammy won't say nothin' for breakin' the old pitcher. He mustn't cry."

The child cried the louder at this.

"There, there, let me wipe its pretty little eyes," and the young rogue managed to close up both the little fellow's eyes with a broad plaster of mud.

His ragged companions stood back against the houses, laughing loudly at this. One of them came out to help Tom in the nice sport he was engaged in. He had taken a double handful of mud from the gutter, and was slyly approaching the disconsolate child, when there came a sudden diversion, in the shape of a boot toe that lifted him bodily from the gutter.

"You young rascallions!" roared the man who had made this assault. "Hang your ugly pictures I'll cool you off."

He grabbed savagely at Tom, but the latter was too quick. He stooped and darted like a rat between the man's legs, coming up with a disdainful laugh on the other side.

"Scoot, boys! Scoot!" he cried. "It's Joe Grimes. He'll skin you if he catches you."

The group of boys broke asunder like a string of beads, and darted in every direction, leaving their assailant to wipe the mud from the child's eyes, and solace him in his trouble.

Tom Tanner lounged lazily on, after he saw there was to be no pursuit. His accomplices in mischief had disappeared, and there was no fun in practical jokes without some one to do the laughing, so he quieted down.

"There's no use talkin'," he cogitated, as some new thoughts came to him. "Dad's not to be fooled with. He'll salt me if I don't strike somethin' to do. I don't see why I can't keep on havin' a good time, like the other boys; but dad's a terror when he gits his back up."

He walked on through street after street, looking lazily around him, and thinking what he would like best as a steady occupation.

"If I could git to be marker for a billiard table, now. Or to set up pins in a ten-pin alley. I expect that fool of a Frank Tanner is huntin' round for a job like a dog after bones. If he gits one, and I don't, there'll be a howlin' old time. I'll warp him out of it, that's all. He ain't a-goin' to discount me."

"By hookey! there's the thing, now!" he cried, slapping his knee. "Queer I didn't think of it afore. Bet I discount Frank yet."

This exclamation arose from his seeing before him an oyster cellar, kept by one Fred Jones, according to the sign.

Tom plunged down the steps like one well acquainted with the locality, and presented himself before the raw-boned and bleary-eyed proprietor.

"You axed me last week to come round," exclaimed Tom. "Here I am. Here's yer oyster."

"Hey! you scapegrace of the slums, is it you?" roared the man, with a hearty laugh.

"So ye'r here, eh?" and he caught Tom affectionately by the hair and hauled him forward. "Let's have a look at you. What d'ye want?"

"Want a job at h'isting the shells off of oysters," answered Tom, with a leer. "You told me you'd put me to work."

"All right, my little cove; you're prime at shell h'isting, that's a fact. Dig right in. Here's Mrs. Trim's kettle from round the corner. She wants a hundred slap out primes. Dig in."

Within five minutes Tom had his coat off, was girded with an apron, and was handling an oyster-knife with the skill of a professor.

Both the Tanner boys had their jobs.

CHAPTER IV.

GETTING OUT OF SITUATIONS.

"THAT'S right, my sons," and Mr. Tanner, Sr., affectionately laid his hands on the heads of his two boys. "There's nothin' like bein' industrious; 'specially in a boy. It sets sich a shinin' example to—to—"

"To their father," suggested Mrs. Tanner.

"Shet up, woman!" growled her husband. "Ye'r allers a-puttin' in at the wrong place. It sets such an example to the babies, as is a-comin' on to be boys, arter you gets to be men. Take care of the babies, and the boys'll take care of theirselves; that's Scripture, my sons. If my work wasn't so redik'lous, mean I'd be sendin' you both to college, 'cos that's where you oughter go. But poor folks can't carry out all their ideas, my sons, partik'lar when they's got a spine in their backs as keeps them from stiddy labor."

The boys by this time had escaped from his exuberant affection, which was laid on a little too heavily for their appetites.

"Tain't very high-toned," continued the father, sprawling into a chair. "I don't jist approve of my boys, as ought to be at college, barkin' for a Jew slop-shop and openin' eysters. But, money's the main brace; jist freeze onto that. Hand over what you've 'arned, Frank. I've got a cruel tiklin' in my throat, and must go and get some opedillock."

"I won't get any money before Saturday night," answered Frank coldly.

"Saturday night! That's a nice bargain for a boy of your talent to make. And me a-braggin' you up for bizness. I'll go high Tom isn't sich a jack as that. Fork over the needful, Tom. I've got to go to the drug store fer a dose of opedillock, and your mammy wants some pigs' knuckles for dinner. So shell out."

"Oh, you go to grass, dad," answered Tom fretfully. "I ain't got a red."

"Then your no sons of mine, and I disown you both," cried the father, drawing his coat around him with the dignity of a Roman Senator. "Ye ain't got the old Tanner blood, or ye'd never go barkin' fer a Jew, or openin' eysters fer a Jerseyman. I never thought as the family'd come to it."

He dashed the back of his hand across his eyes to wipe away some imaginary tears, and stalked out of the room with as woe-begone an expression as though he was about to commit suicide for the honor of the old Tanners. But if the whole truth of history was known it might prove that his journey ended in Neil McGrump's sample room, where old Tanner yet had a shadow of credit for old rye.

"There's no use talking," said Frank, despondingly. "Father is past mending. There's very little encouragement for us boys to try and make a living."

"Oh! you be bust'd!" exclaimed Tom, rolling over on the floor. "You're always a-pickin' at dad. If he likes whisky better'n he does bread, he's his own boss, I reckon. What's the use of your pitchin' in?"

"He ought to be working, and keeping his family respectably," replied Frank.

"That be blazed! If I was as old as dad, and had two lazy boys like you and me, I wouldn't work neither. And if they wouldn't work I'd wallop them like dad used to wallop us."

"I wish you'd both hush up," Mrs. Tanner querulously broke in. "Boys have no business to be discussing their father."

She was a little at a loss which side to take in the controversy.

"I ain't a-cussin' my father," replied Tom, taking an extra roll. "If there's anybody a-cussin' it's Frank. I freeze onto dad too much for that."

"Well, I don't," exclaimed Frank, decidedly, as he set his hat firmly on his head and left the room. He knew that Tom was only twitting him to make him angry, and thought it best to avoid a quarrel.

Early the next day the boys were at their work, Tom at the oyster cellar, Frank at the clothing store. The latter had succeeded in coaxing two or three customers into the shop on the previous day, and now went eagerly to work, hoping to have a good day of it.

Tom, too, plunged industriously into his work. He had a special admiration for oysters, and fancied that he would like to open them by the year, with the chance of slipping a plump one occasionally down his throat, when nobody was looking.

Fred Jones, the proprietor of the establishment, knew something of this propensity in boys, and shut his eyes, with a quiet smile, when he saw an occasional oyster slip hastily down Tom's greedy throat. He had done the

same thing himself when he was a boy, and had so sickened himself of oysters in two days' time, that he had never liked them since. So he did not fear that Tom's appetite would greatly cut down his profits.

But the greedy boy had no idea that he was observed, and every few minutes, when he fancied that Fred's back was turned, he would hastily grab up an oyster from its shell, and stuff it into his mouth, swallowing it at a single gulp.

Suddenly, after such an evolution, Tom dropped shells and knife, and went spitting and sputtering around the cellar, making the most grotesque contortions of face. Fred turned to him with a great show of surprise.

"Hillo, my bully boy!" he cried. "What's your way in Canada now, my lark? Got nipped by a crab, I s'pose. Or pinched by an oyster-shell, maybe."

"It must have been a crab," acknowledged Tom, still sputtering.

Fred turned away to hide a smile.

"He swallowed a rotten one, that time," muttered the veteran. "They allers do when they're in a hurry. I guess Tom Tanner'll git his fill sooner than the most on them does."

Tom, in fact, didn't want any more oysters just then. He had swallowed, in his haste, such a very bad one, that he feared he would never get the taste out of his mouth, and he went back to his business of filling the customers' kettles with a look of disgust upon his expressive face.

Things went on quietly for a few minutes, and then there was a new diversion. The servant girl of Mrs. Trim, for whom Tom had opened a hundred primes the night before, came hastily into the cellar, her face inflamed with anger.

"It's lucky fer yerself, Mister Jones," she loudly began, "that it's me, and not the mistress, as is come to see ye this blessed mornin'. For us, as has been yer best customers more nor a year; and one might think we was new come-outers, as had niver seen an 'yster, to be put on so."

"Blazes! What's up, Mrs. Delany?" cried Fred in alarm. "You didn't serve none of the shells up along with the oysters, hey?"

"It's far wuss nor that," answered the girl, in a solemn tone. "And it's afeared I was the mistress'd go off in a dead fit."

"But what, in the name of all the salt fish of the Atlantic has bust'd?" roared Fred. "Out with it, ye long-winded daughter of Erin. What's the row?"

"The row is bad 'ysters," answered the girl, more solemnly than ever. "Siven of 'em to the hundred. Sorry the one less. And they were rolled up nicely in bread crumbs, and fried as brown as berries, and never diskivered till the folks put their teeth in them this mornin' at breakfast. And then sich a hellabaloo as there was! Ye might 'a' thought it was all my fault; and me a-knowin' no more consarnin' the qualities of 'ysters nor a born baby."

Fred, despite the anger that was upon his face, could not help a burst of laughter. But he then turned sharply to Tom, who had thought it good policy to echo his laugh.

"So this is your first specimen of work, you scapegrace! This is the way you serve my best customers, you snortin' little sand-bar! And you think it's prime fun, do you? Somethin' to laugh at, you son of a corporal? Hang me for a cow's uncle if I'm going to have my best customers sarved with rotten oysters by you, and be laughed at in the bargain by a red-necked Jackanapes! Git, now!"

"What?" asked Tom, in surprise.

"Git, I say! Git's the word!"

"You don't say that you're agoin' to giv' me my walkin' papers?"

"Well, I guess that's about the weight of it."

"And for nothin' except puttin' a bad oyster or two in a whole kittle of 'em?"

"You've got the heft of it there, Tom Tanner, and the quicker you make tracks the better it might be for your health."

"Well, all I've got to say is, it's confounded shabby."

"Shabby, hey?" and the furious oysterman made a spring toward his impudent apprentice. But Tom was quicker still. He turned a hand-spring over the oyster bar and landed on the floor outside. Safely reaching the steps that led to the street, he stopped and called back:

"See here, Fred Jones, you're a good deal too partik'lar. I ain't a-goin' to work for a feller that kicks up sech a dust about nothin'. It isn't my fault if you buy spiled oysters. And if the whole hundred had been rotten you couldn't 'a' stirred up a wuss hurricane about it. Jist you

pay me off, for I ain't goin' to open another oyster in this here old shanty."

"Pay you off, hey?"

"Yes. I want pay for five hours' work."

"Hang you, you've eat oysters enough now to pay you, rotten ones and all," with a grim smile at the recollection. "If there's anything more a-comin' to you, I'll settle it right here on the nail."

He picked up a leather strap that lay behind him and made for Tom. The latter individual thought it about time to leave.

"A royal old row to be kicked up 'bout sich a trifle," grumbled Tom, as he walked disconsolately along. "Howsomever, if they tasted anything like the one I swallowed, I don't wonder old Mrs. Trim got a bit on her ear. It was enough to make a hog sick," and he furiously spat out the bad taste that came into his mouth at the recollection. "Well, here I am on the street ag'in, out of a job. But I'm hanged if I'm goin' to let that nice-talkin' little humbug of a Frank Tanner discount me. I'll warp him, see if I don't."

Frank, meanwhile, had been having some success. He had already sent in three customers to the tender mercies of old Franks. They would need to be very sharp sheep if they didn't come out shorn after passing through his hands.

Frank was quick witted and lively, and gave promise of making a successful salesman.

"This way, sir. Step right in. We can fit you out with anything you want. Come in, sir. Won't charge you anything for showing our goods. You can try on anything in the establishment, from a neck-tie to an ulster, and if you ain't satisfied you can walk out a ain; and if you're fond of pictures we'll give you a chromo for your trouble. Walk right in, sir."

The gaping countryman, at whom Frank shot off this voluble harangue, took him at his word and walked in, without knowing just for what.

And so it went on for the next hour. The youthful salesman was already beginning to make a reputation in the street.

But at the end of that time there was a disagreeable diversion. There came along Tom Tanner, accompanied by four or five of his vagabond associates.

"Whoopee!" cried Tom, as if he had made a great discovery. "Look there, fellers! It's my nice brother Frank, as sure as you live, playing barker for old Jew Franks. My eye, isn't this jolly? Come up, fellers. What'll you have? Fit you out in anything. Nicest fashions goin'. Tight pants; snub-nosed jackets; checker-board vests. Step right up, and git fit."

The young rascals with him laughed heartily as Tom ran this off in a shrill voice, affecting to offer them the goods that hung outside. Frank's face grew very red.

"Now you get away from here, Tom," he cried, angrily. "If you come here trying to make a fool of me, I'll—"

"You'll what?" blustered Tom, coming up close with clinched fists.

"No matter what. You get out, 'hat's all."

"I thought he'd back water," laughed Tom. "Here's yer fine horse-hair beaver, gentlemen, made of cows' tails. Jist try it on. It's warranted to fit everybody."

The coat at which he was tugging came loose in his hands. With an impulse of mischief he commenced to put it on one of his associates, whose arms were innocent of coat and almost of shirt.

"Take it off!" cried Frank.

"Yes, with a hook!"

"Hey! Vat's goin' on there?" exclaimed the Jew, suddenly appearing. "Vat you doin' mit my coats, hey? Father Abraham, I'm bein' robbed! Catch him, you poy! Catch the young t'ief!"

Frank started forward to do so, but the boys ran off with a shout of disdain.

"Run after him!" cried the Jew, dancing with excitement. "Run after him!"

At this order Frank gave chase. The boys had already gained several yards, and the street was too full of people for much speed to be made, either in flight or pursuit. Frank hesitated about giving the alarm of "Stop thief!" for fear of getting his brother into trouble, and so he ran on silently, though the Jew was making as much noise as though half of his stock had been stolen.

The chase had not proceeded far before Tom, who had lagged behind his companions, suddenly threw himself in the way of the pursuer, and tripped him so that he fell sprawling to the ground. Then the mischievous young rascal

ran off in the opposite direction, with a shriek of laughter.

"I bet Frank's salted with the old Jew now," he cogitated. "I knowed I'd warp him."

He calculated rightly. When Frank, after a despairing effort to take up the chase again, returned to the store, he found the old fellow wild with excitement.

"You no got my coat?" he cried, seizing Frank by the collar. "You no call 'stop t'ief!' You want them to get off mit der coat!"

"I did my best," answered Frank.

"You lie, you little rascal! You know dem poys! Don't you know dem poys?"

Frank was silent.

"You know dem poys, you t'ief!"

"Let go my coat!" cried Frank, angrily, shaking himself loose. "It don't matter what I know or what I don't know. Just pay me off, and that will settle it. I'm done working for you."

"You know dem poys; and you want me gif you monish! I owe you no monish!"

"You owe me for six customers. That is sixty cents," returned Frank.

"I owe you no nothing. They didn't puy. I was to gif you nothing for anybody as didn't puy."

"You lying old villain!" exclaimed Frank angrily. "I saw them buy. I wasn't fool enough to trust you. Say, are you going to pay me or not?"

"I owes you notting. Dey was my old customers. Bring me back my coat, and I pays you. My beautiful coat, worth t'ree tollars."

"All right," said Frank. "I will bring it back if I can. And if you don't pay me then, I will find some way to get even with you, I promise you that."

And he walked briskly away, again out of a job.

CHAPTER V.

A STERN PARENT.

MRS. TANNER had a very disconsolate look as she pattered about her household duties, doing her best to keep order where her careless family did their best to make confusion.

"It's very trying," she said to herself, "that those boys can't keep situations. It's just one trouble after another, and it all comes on us. We did live comfortable for a while when they were in the pen factory; but here's the old trouble all over again. I declare it's just discouraging. I don't know though, as I ought to blame the boys so much, when their drunken father, Jacob Tanner—"

She checked herself suddenly, for the door at that minute opened, and in came Jacob Tanner, sober for once in a fortnight. He held in his hand a short, stout leather whip.

"See here, wife," he began. "I've been investigating."

"Investigating?"

"Jist so. I've been 'round to collect the little balances that's comin' to my boys."

"Ah!" she cried with some interest. "And did you get them?"

"I thought that would wake you up, woman," he replied, with grim satisfaction. "I never see'd sich a cormorant as you are for money. Why, you'd swallow up the United States bank and swear it weren't a mouthful. Well, I didn't git no money, then, so you can put that in your pipe and smoke it."

"What did you get?" asked the poor woman.

"I got characters. I've found out what sort of critters them boys is."

"Ah!" she ejaculated, her heart sinking with fear for her favorite son.

"Yes, wife, and I'm proud of one of 'em, and ashamed of t'other. One's a honor to any family, and t'other's an out-and-out little devil. But t'ier's ways of gittin' even," and he made the whip whistle through the air.

"Oh, mercy, Jacob!" she cried in alarm.

"You are not going to whip Frank?"

"I didn't name no names," was the non-committal reply. "I'm a-goin' to git even, that's all!"

The poor little woman fell back on her chair, and covered her face with her hands. She had a presentiment of what was coming, and knew that it would be of no use to interfere.

He looked down upon her with a queer expression, while he drew the whip grimly through his hand.

At this moment the door opened, and the two boys entered in company. It was strange how like they were and yet how unlike. Any one could have told at a glance that they were brothers. The same regular, well-cut features, the same color of hair and eyes, the same light and shape. Yet any one would have

called Frank handsome and Tom homely. It was all in the expression. The open, manly, good humored look of one, was replaced by a selfish, sneaking, hang-dog look in the other. Frank's form was erect, with a free active step. Tom was slouching in figure and dragging in gait. Even their mode of entering the room told their different characters. Frank took off his hat politely to his parents, and quietly seated himself in an upright dignified attitude. Tom sprawled in the nearest chair, flung his hat at the cat under the table, and gave vent to a loud groan, as though he was expiring with fatigue.

Jacob Tanner stood upright before his sons, casting an odd look from one to the other, while he held the hand containing the whip behind him. Mrs. Tanner crouched rather than sat in her chair, with a frightened look upon her face. The boys felt involuntarily that there was a storm brewing.

"See here, young chaps," began their father, in a short, stern accent. "Ther' ain't no use to mince matters. I've been investergatin'. Or, to come down to the level of your intellocks, I've been a findin' out things."

"The deuce!" whistled Tom.

Frank kept silent and expectant.

"That's the long and short of it," continued their indignant parent. "I've been round to Wilson's pen-factory, and picked up a pint or two there. And I've been to Fred Jones's oyster bay, and got another pint. And I've been to old Frank's slop-shop, and gathered up another pint. What's more, chapees, I've been a puttin' them pints together, and mebbe ye'd like to know what they all come to."

Mrs. Tanner was certainly afraid they would come to trouble. She was rocking herself nervously in her chair, while her eyes had a frightened look.

"They just come to this," continued Mr. Tanner, a stern resolution setting into his face. "One of you's a confounded little hound and rascal. T'her's a gentleman right through to the bone. I ain't a sayin' which is which, for that's a pint which ye'll find out afore yer much older. There's goin' to be a wallopin' old time round here, my lively lads, and the boy as has a bad conscience can know where it's comin'."

Tom put his tongue in his cheek as he glanced over at Frank, whose pale face seemed to reflect that of his mother.

Mr. Tanner's eyes, in fact, appeared to be fixed on Frank, and they had a very malevolent look as he moved with a sidling gait toward his youngest son, still keeping his hand behind him.

Frank did not stir. His face only grew a shade paler, and his eyes were firmly set, but he showed no sign of rebellion. Mrs. Tanner despairingly clutched the back of her chair, as if to restrain herself from interfering. As for Tom, a look of mischievous satisfaction spread over his face, and he made a grotesque mouth at Frank.

"Scripture says, 'Spare the rod and spile the child,'" remarked the stern father, as he came very near Frank, with outstretched hand. "Now it's my Christian duty not to spile the child, if I wear out all the rods in North Ameriky."

Frank shrunk back involuntarily from the outreaching hand, but it did not fall upon him. For in an instant Jacob Tanner had taken a quick step across the room and caught the grinning Tom by the collar, bringing him by a quick jerk to his feet, while the whip was brandished in the air above his head.

"You thought it was Frank, did you, you tricky little rapsallion?" Whiz came the whip across his shoulders. "It's allus Frank, hey?" whiz. "You've been a-playin' it on Frank, blame yer eyes!" whiz. "An honest," whiz, "brave," whiz, "industrious," whiz, "boy like Frank! And you're a lazy," whiz, "lying," whiz, "back-bitin'," whiz, "little devil's cub, that's straight on the road to the State prison, and a good riddance to you," whiz, whiz, whiz.

Tom was dancing and howling with pain, as the whip continued to descend viciously upon his shoulders. Chairs were overturned and the table sent reeling into a corner as the indignant parent hauled him about the room, inflicting such a castigation as he had never before experienced.

Mrs. Tanner released her convulsive hold upon the chair. Her revulsion of feeling showed itself in a nervous little laugh. Tom's sins had been so many, and his punishment so slight, that she felt that a righteous retribution had at last fallen upon him.

As for Frank, his pale look was replaced with a deep flush. He had risen to his feet, and was grasping his chair to restrain himself, while at

every stroke of the whip he slightly shrunk as though it had fallen upon himself.

"Oh, don't, father!" he appealed, in a pained tone. "Tom isn't so bad. He's only full of fun like all the boys. Ain't he had enough now? Won't you let him off?"

"Dry up, Frank. He's lied you into many a sound whoppin', and laughed at you into the bargain. I'm goin' to scorch the Old Nick out of him afore I've done."

And the whip descended with more vim than ever. But Tom had ceased his howling, and a wicked look had come into his eyes. With a quick downward jerk he broke loose from his father's grasp, leaving his collar and a handful of shirt bosom in his hand.

In an instant he darted to the door, which yet stood open. He turned upon the threshold, his face blazing with evil passion.

"All right, dad!" he ejaculated. "You've had your innings to-day. Jist see if I don't git mine in the next round. I ain't nobody's baby, to stand here and be licked for nothin'. I'm done with this here shanty, and I'd bu'st a blood-vessel afore I'd work another day to find you in whisky-money. As for that pretty-faced baby, Frank Tanner, that you're all a coddlin'—"

"Well, as for him?" broke in the father, who had not stirred a step.

"I'll settle his hash, that's all. He can plug into jobs as fast as he wants. See if I don't plug him out on 'em. And for you, dad—"

"Well, for me?" queried the father.

"I'll— I'll— Blame me, if I don't blow on you at every whisky mill in the diggin's, and cut off your likker."

At this portentous threat Mr. Tanner gave a deep groan, and made a savage spring at his defiant son. But Tom was on the look-out. He darted quickly into the passage outside. In a moment he was on the stairs, and running rapidly down to the street. He had taken a new step forward in his bad career.

Mr. Tanner turned back and threw the whip into a corner, while he seated himself heavily upon a chair. There was a gloomy look on his face. Tom had been his favorite son; had he driven him from his home?

Frank's generous heart prompted him to say a good word for his brother, but it was not easy to come in after what had just passed. He stood with parted lips, slightly panting, and with his eyes fixed strangely upon his father. The mother crept around, and laid her hand upon that of her son.

"Don't say a word, Frank," she entreatingly whispered. "Tom has been a very bad boy, and it is well that your father has found him out. I fear he is on the road to ruin."

"I shall do what I can to save him," answered Frank, devotedly. "I don't believe Tom is bad at heart. He is full of mischief, I know, but it's only a boy's way."

"It's a thief's way. It's a footpad's way!" broke in Mr. Tanner harshly. "Don't say a word in his favor, or I'll wollop you next. Not a word, d'ye hear?"

Frank subsided into silence.

A few minutes of uneasy quiet passed, and then he took his hat.

"I must be on my rounds again, mother," he said. "I couldn't find any work this morning, but I may hit on something this afternoon. I can't afford to be idle."

The mother's eyes followed the graceful form of her boy with proud affection as he walked out of the room, turning to give a kindly nod as he did so.

There was silence in the room for some ten minutes afterward, Mrs. Tanner going quietly about her work, while her husband sat in depressed gloom.

"I don't know if it was all for the best," he at length muttered, "but what was a man to do? Tom lied like a thief to us, wife," he continued. "It was him kicked up all that row at the pen factory, and Frank only stood up for him. They told me all about it. And it was Tom and a party of other young hounds that dished Frank at the slop-shop; and stole a coat into the bargain, hang them. I didn't give the little villain half the rations he deserved."

A knock at the door stopped his harangue. Mrs. Tanner hastened to open it, and a fine-looking and well-dressed middle-aged gentleman entered.

"Am I in the right place?" he asked. "Is there a boy of the name of Frank Tanner, lives here?"

"Yes, sir," replied Mr. Tanner eagerly. "He is my son."

"Ah! He seems to be a fine fellow."

"You bet he's a fine feller, sir. He's jist the

primesc boy as ever— But it don't become his father to brag. Who mought I be a-talkin' to, sir?"

"Here is my card," rejoined the gentleman. "I am Mr. Clark, of the firm of Thompson, Clark & Co. Your boy applied for a situation in our house, and I rather like his appearance and address. Is he in?"

"I'm very sorry to say as he's not in, sir. But I'll go on the hunt of him instanter."

"That is not necessary," Mr. Clark quietly replied. "Send him down to our house tomorrow morning. I would like to have a talk with him."

"I shall most sartainly do so," answered Mr. Tanner obsequiously, as his visitor turned to leave the room. "Take keer of the stairs, sir. Ther a bit broken."

"Thanks. I shall be careful."

In a moment he was gone.

Mr. Tanner turned to his wife with a look of proud satisfaction.

"That's a nobby feller, wife. I bet it's a big firm. Our Frank 'll be a rich merchant yit. You mark my words."

"I hope he may, for I know he will be an honest one," replied the little woman gratefully.

CHAPTER VI.

FRANK GETS INTO TROUBLE.

FRANK TANNER was very much cast down as he walked listlessly along the streets of New York. Everything had been going wrong lately. His father's idleness and Tom's recklessness had thrown the whole burden of the family on his shoulders, and he was too young to have such a weight of responsibility. For several hours now he had been looking for a situation, but had been curtly refused at every place at which he applied. The trouble about Tom, too, was weighing upon him. He had been all his life accustomed to look up to Tom, and now he could not get rid of the old feeling for his elder brother. He would not believe that Tom was bad at heart, and was sure that it was only his boyish wildness that got him into so many scrapes.

Frank was only a boy yet, and not capable of a sound judgment of character, and he walked on very much in the blues about poor Tom.

But his eyes caught sight of something that made a sudden change in his feelings. Several urchins were playing marbles on a quiet corner of the pavement; ragged little vagrants, except that one seemed too well dressed for his company.

A light shot into Frank's eyes. He crept stealthily up, and in an instant pounced upon this well dressed urchin, bringing him to his feet with a sudden quick jerk.

"What you doin' that fur? You let go me or I'll plug you," cried the belligerent lad.

"I've been looking for you, you little thief," exclaimed Frank. "A nicely dressed little hound you are now, with a stolen coat on your dirty back."

It was evident, in fact, that the boy's coat was much too large for him.

"It's my coat!" yelled the lad. "Daddy bought it fur me."

"You lie, you thief. That's old Frank's coat, which Tom Tanner put on you. Come with me. I'm responsible for that coat."

"I won't go a step, dang you!" screamed the boy, as Frank dragged him along the pavement.

"You shall go then," and Frank set his teeth resolutely. "You shall go, if I have to carry you."

He was determined. He had been put in a false position by the loss of the coat, and was bent on setting himself right, no matter who suffered.

"Hello, boys!" cried Frank's prisoner. "Ye ain't goin' to let this fellow carry me off now, is ye?"

The other urchins, at this appeal, made a combined assault on Frank, who had as much as he wanted to do in beating them off, and holding on to his prisoner.

"You've got to come," he cried. "That coat was stolen when it was in my care. I am going to take it back, and you in it."

"Take yer old coat," whined the boy. "It's too big for me anyhow."

"I will take it, and you too," answered Frank, with set teeth, as he warded off the blows of his assailants.

He caught the boy by his coat collar. It was a poor hold, for the next instant the prisoner stooped, and slipped out of his ill-fitting coat as easily as a rat might slip out of a bushel bag.

With a vicious kick at Frank's shins the escaped captive ran off, followed by his com-

panions, and with a shrill laugh of disdain as they left Frank standing alone holding the empty coat.

For a moment he looked as if inclined to pursue them. But a second thought restrained him.

"Maybe it's as well to let him go," he reflected. "I might get Tom into trouble. I've got the coat; that's the main item."

There was a deep sense of satisfaction in his mind, as he made his way toward Chatlam street. He felt that his honor was at stake, and perhaps even his honesty called in question. This article had been stolen when under his charge. It would not have been stolen but for his taking that position. Frank was very sensitive where a question of honor was concerned, and felt as deeply responsible as though he had himself stolen the coat.

He walked into old Franks's clothing store with an air of quiet triumph, carrying the rescued article over his shoulder.

"Hey, poy! What brings you mit my store ag'in?" cried the Jew angrily.

"I have come for the money you owe me," answered Frank.

"You git out! I owes you no monish. You brings me my coat, and I gives you all the monish I owes you."

"Very well. Here is the coat."

The Jew's eyes glistened. He sprung eagerly forward to grasp the coat, but Frank backed off.

"Not too fast," he exclaimed. "I've brought you the coat. Haven't I toed the mark plum in that?"

"Toed the mark?" repeated the Jew, questioningly.

"Yes. Ain't I square up? Haven't I rubbed out my score? I thought you understood good English, Mr. Franks. Haven't I come up honest and sound?"

Yes, yes!" cried the Jew. "You're a very goot poy. Gif me my coat."

"Will you take me on and give me a job again?"

"Yes, yes, I gif you one job ag'in."

"I guess you won't then," answered Frank dryly. "Pay me off what you owe me, and I'll give you the coat."

"I owes you no notting," replied the Jew doggedly.

"You won't pay me off then?"

"You gif me the coat, or I have you arrested for stealin'. I owes you no monish at all."

"I'd serve you right if I carried the coat off again to where I got it," answered Frank contemptuously. "But I'll be honest, whether you choose to play the rogue or not. Here is your coat."

The Jew made an eager grab for it, but he received it in a vigorous swipe across the face, dealt with all the strength of Frank's arm. Half blinded the greedy old rogue fell back. The indignant boy threw the coat after him, with such force that it twisted round and round his head. Then Frank stalked with dignity out of the store.

"Much use in taking all that trouble for you," he muttered. "But honesty is honesty. If he chooses to be a rogue that don't excuse me for being one. And anyhow I've had some satisfaction out of him."

He laughed quietly to himself at the thought of how he had paid the old Jew for his meanness.

"Maybe I'd best go back and get a written character from him," Frank continued. "It would be useful if I applied for another job as baker. I wonder what kind of a character old Franks would give me."

While thus cogitating he had proceeded a considerable distance, and had turned into a quiet street leading between two of the business streets.

He had not proceeded far up this avenue before he became aware of a tumult before him. Several boys, of about his own size, were furiously fighting. A second look showed Frank that it was a fight of three to one, and that the one was his brother Tom, who was evidently getting the worst of it.

Frank didn't like fighting. As he plainly said, he would rather run than fight any day. But it was not because he was a coward, but because he thought fighting a disgraceful and low-lived business.

"Suppose a boy calls me a liar," he would say. "Will I prove I ain't one by plugging his nose, and putting his eyes in mourning? If I ain't a liar his saying so won't make me one."

But this was a different matter. Here was Tom in danger. It was no time to stop and find out the cause of the quarrel. Without a mo-

ment's hesitation Frank plunged in, and astonished one of Tom's antagonists by a touch under the ear that made him see stars.

"Cowards!" he cried between his teeth. "Three of you on one! Give it to them, Tom! Pelt that curly-headed chap. I'll take this one."

There was a sudden diversion in Tom's favor, as Frank's fists shot sharply to right and left. The three boys gave way before this reinforcement, leaving Tom, for the moment, free. The selfish young rogue took advantage of this opportunity to take to his heels. He had been somewhat punished, and with the instinct of the selfish coward he did not care who got hurt so he got off.

Frank continued to fight, unaware of the cowardly action of his brother. But his antagonists were three young vagrants who were used to hard pummeling. They saw their advantage, and turned on the devoted boy. He fought hard, but they were too much for him. Frank turned his head despairingly to look for Tom, and only then discovered that he had been deserted.

A quick sense of shame and indignation filled his heart. But much as Frank hated quarreling, there was no back down in him. He was in for it now, and was going to either whip or be whipped.

Blows fell thick and fast between the combatants. Frank knocked down one of his assailants and grappled with another, the most dangerous of the three. He was heavier than Frank, but not so quick, and a vigorous wrestling match followed. It ended by the two of them falling together into the muddy street, where they rolled like young savages each doing his best to disable the other. Frank's other antagonists hovered around trying to get in a blow, but the movements of the wrestlers were too quick to permit it.

Yet even in the midst of the struggle Frank could not help feeling ashamed of himself. He had prided himself on his self control and respectability, and here he was rolling in the mud, fighting with a street Arab. And much ashamed as he was of himself, he was tenfold more ashamed of his brother.

"But I am in for it, and I've got to lick or be licked," he thought, setting his teeth firmly, and grinding his enemy's head into the mud.

At this moment there was a diversion. Frank felt a desperate kick in the side from one of the other boys, and at the same time he heard a stern voice.

"How is this?" came in loud accents. "Three to one? Shame on you, boys! Stop fighting, or I will call an officer."

The magic word "officer" suddenly took the starch out of the Arabs. The two upright ones backed off, and the other tore himself loose from Frank's loosened grasp and scrambled to his feet. Frank followed him rather slowly. He had been overmatched, and his strength was nearly gone.

Frank was an object when he had gained his feet. Mud from head to feet, even his hair matted with mud; his clothes torn; blood reddening the mud-patches on his face: he was almost unrecognizable.

He hoped, indeed, that he would not be recognized, for his involuntary glance toward the gentleman who had interfered gave him a start. It was Mr. Clark, of Thompson, Clark & Co.

Thoroughly ashamed of his appearance Frank turned his head, hoping to escape the sharp eyes of the gentleman.

"There is no use, my boy" said Mr. Clark sharply. "I know you, and I am sorry enough to find you in such a disgraceful business."

The other boys, who had withdrawn but a few steps, laughed at Frank's downcast aspect.

"I couldn't help it, Mr. Clark," he humbly answered. "And I'd do it again if those fellows attacked me," he continued more fiercely, as the sound of their laugh caught his ears.

"I have no doubt you would," replied Mr. Clark cuttingly. "I see that you are full of fight. I took a fancy to you, Frank Tanner. I have just been to see your parents, and asked them to send you down to my store. But you needn't come, I don't want you. You are not the kind of boy that I care to take in hand."

Frank hung his head dejectedly. Tom had got him into trouble again. But a quick revulsion came upon him. He had nothing really to be ashamed of. He had only sought to defend his brother against overwhelming odds. Frank lifted his head with a proud movement, and looked Mr. Clark in the face.

"I am sorry, Mr. Clark," he said, "for I would have liked to be with you. But I couldn't help fighting these boys; and if I had it to

do over I would fight them again, if the Governor of New York stood by."

Frank turned and walked away, his dignity considerably reduced by his appearance. But Mr. Clark looked after him with a thoughtful eye. Something in Frank's last words had arrested his attention.

Frank had got rid of considerable of his mud before he reached home, but he was not yet a very inviting object.

"Hillo!" cried his father. "What's up, boy? Yer a blamed pretty pictur'."

"Been fighting," answered Frank quietly, as he proceeded to wash his face.

"Fighting?" exclaimed his mother, running to him in alarm.

"I ain't much hurt, mother," answered Frank.

"I guess I gave as good as I got."

"Well, I'll be dumfounded!" whistled his father. "Frank fightin'! I'd as soon ha' thought of Tom readin' hymn books. Hurry and git off them muddy duds, boy, and git on your Sunday clothes, fer I've a bit of news for you. You've struck ile, my lad."

"What do you mean, father?" asked Frank, pausing on his way to the next room.

"There's been a gentleman here after you, from a bang-up 'stablishment. Mr. Clark, of Thompson, Clark & Co.," reading from the card. "I cal'klate ther's a prime job waitin' for you. You're goin' to be in clover, my son."

"I fear not," replied Frank dejectedly. "It's a bad business, but Mr. Clark saw me in that fight. It's all up. He told me that I needn't come and see him."

Frank walked from the room, leaving his father the picture of surprise and growing anger.

"There's yer polite son for ye, Mrs. Tanner," he exclaimed spitefully. "I've been a-braggin' up that boy and kickin' poor Tom out of the house. And this is what comes of it. Arter all my endeavors to git him a sitiuation too. It's too confounded bad, Mrs. Tanner, and I'm goin' to be even with him."

He commenced to look for the discarded whip.

"No, no," cried his wife in alarm. "The boy did not fight without good cause. Hear his story first, Jacob."

"I'm a-goin' to git even with him," remarked Mr. Tanner, very decidedly.

But at that moment there came a knock upon the door. Mrs. Tanner hastened to open it, and revealed the portly figure of Mr. Clark. At the same moment Frank emerged from the inner room, dressed in his best suit and presenting a very different appearance from that of five minutes before.

CHAPTER VII.

DOWN HILL AND UP HILL PATHS.

If there had been any sense of shame in Tom Tanner's soul he would have been thoroughly ashamed of himself as he ran off and left his brother to fight his battle alone. But he was far too selfish to care for aught but his own comfort. In his miserable little heart he even felt glad to have got Frank into trouble.

"It's him as got me licked by dad," he cogitated. "I hope them rats 'll give him a good scorchin'. I'm bound to git even with him, the rascally little stuck-up, that's allers a-gettin' me into trouble. I jist wish I'd stayed there and seen 'em pelt him."

But staying might have involved getting pelted himself, and Tom had no fancy for that. If anybody was fool enough to take up his quarrels, well and good. They might have the fun of fighting them out, for he was going to save his precious skin at all hazards.

He was laughing quietly to himself over the scrape he had got Frank into, when he was accosted by a young gentleman who had approached him unnoticed.

There was something very peculiar in the appearance of this person. He was very short and very stout, and looked as if some heavy weight had fallen upon his head, flattening him down and spreading him out. He walked with a peculiar roll, as if he had been to sea in his days. In face he was far from prepossessing. His nose was short, and very much turned up at the end. His mouth was unusually wide; his eyes small, half shut, but sharp as steel gimlets. A shock of reddish hair bristled up over his large head.

His attire was as odd as his appearance. A pair of wide pantaloons, held up by one suspender, and rolled up several inches at the bottom; a coat which looked as if made as an overcoat for a man of twice his size; and a hat that

was set very much on one side of his shock of hair, completed the outward appearance of this youthful individual.

He took a clay pipe from his mouth on observing Tom, and addressed him very familiarly.

"The top o' the mornin' to ye, my jolly cove. Pass over yer flippers, Tom 'Tanner, and say what in the blazes is bu'sted: fur yer nose is barked like all thunder, and ye've had a nor'-wester plumb in yer starboard eye."

"A little bit of a scrimmage," Tom modestly answered. "Got into a row with three skinners, and laid them out. But a feller can't save his face when there's three to one."

"Lay it right there, bully boy!" exclaimed the other delightedly. "Why yer a hoss, Tom, if yer ain't lyin'. But blame yer jolly eyes ye kin lie faster than a mule kin swaller oats. What's the lay?"

"Lookin' for a job," answered Tom.

"Lookin' fer dunder and blitzen! A chap like you, with ten fingers and ten toes of yer own, and a-wantin' to go to work. Why, I never hearn tell of sich an idyot. Trot yer shanks along arter yer uncle, and I'll rake ye inter a perfession. I like ye like blazes, Tom, and I'm goin' to do the sound thing by you, right chock up. Lookin' fur work, you beggar! Why, I'll make a gentleman of ye. A tight lad like you, as has got his wits about him! Work be fiddled! Foller me, my charmer."

Tom hesitated a moment. He knew something of the antecedents of this promising youth, and was not sure whether it was advisable to follow his lead.

"See here, Bandy Ben," replied Tom dubiously. "What's in the wind? I ain't no fool, to foller every chap that chooses to whistle."

"All serene," rejoined Bandy, hitching up his trowsers. "I'm not goin' to git down on my shin bones to beg ye. Go home to yer daddy, and don't be cavortin' round 'mong folks as has cut the'r eye teeth."

He clapped his pipe again between his lips and sent out a long puff of smoke, as he looked at Tom with a sidewise glance from his cunning little eyes.

"Can't go home," answered Tom. "Dad's kicked up the awfulest scrimmage. Laid it on to me like a forty-knot breeze. I cut stick and run fur it, Bandy. Don't think I'll back water that-a-way soon."

Bandy burst into such a fit of laughter that the pipe fell from lips and smashed into flinders on the pavement, while a mouthful of smoke went down his windpipe, and half choked him. His mirth was followed by a strangling, coughing, stamping and cursing that made Tom draw back in some alarm. It was several minutes before Bandy recovered from the effects of his explosion.

"Durn yer eyes!" he cried, taking Tom by the collar. "If ye say anything as funny as that ag'in, blame me if I don't bu'st yer b'iler! My eyes, it must 'a' been jolly! Wouldn't I liked to seen yer old dad a-bastin' ye! Make ye skip, Tom? Make ye holler St. Martin? S'pose he brung all the dust outen yer coat, hey?"

And Bandy broke into another fit of laughter. "Dry up," exclaimed Tom, angrily, "or I'll punch your head!"

"That's my meat!" cried Bandy delightedly. "Git in yer flippers, my covey! Why, I ain't had a scrimmage fur a week, and I'm gittin' as rusty as an old hulk. Squar' yerself, my bully bu'ster!"

The dwarfish imp flung himself into an attitude before Tom, and threw up his muscular arms in professional style.

"Oh, drop all that, Bandy!" cried Tom, a little scared. "I've had enough of that fun for one day."

"Ye ain't goin' to back down?" Bandy's voice was full of regret. "Won't let a feller git in one left hander? Why, shoot ye, I've a notion to give ye a sockdologer anyhow, jist to keep my hand in. I'm sp'ilin' fur practice."

Tom backed off in alarm as he saw the look of professional disappointment in Bandy's eye.

"I won't fight you, anyhow," answered Tom. "It'd be like a cat fightin' an elephant. You're more than my match, Bandy."

"Wish I could plane meself down," said Bandy, regretfully. "I'm jist wastin' away fur a scrimmage. Howsomdever, we'll let that slide. Jist ye sail along in my wake, my hearty. I kinder freeze to ye, Tom. I'm goin' to make a man of ye. Werk be fiddled! I'll gin ye a perfession as ye kin be proud of all yer life."

Bandy rolled independently away, with one hand in his pocket, and a finger of the other in a button-hole of his coat. His hat was set more on one side than ever. Tom's eyes followed

him doubtfully for a minute, and then he started after him.

It had been an instant of the utmost importance to his future life. He had come to the parting of two ways, one leading to honesty and virtue, one to vice and crime. He may well have hesitated. But he had chosen according to his nature. He had taken the path of crime. Nor was it done blindly; for he knew well to what Bandy Ben was leading him.

But leaving Tom Tanner to tread the path which he had chosen, we must return to his brother, whom we also left at a critical period of his young life.

He had, as we have related, come from the inner room of the Tanner apartments at the same moment as Mr. Clark appeared at the door of the outer room. Frank's heart sunk within him on seeing who was there. This gentleman must have come to upbraid him, and the boy's first impulse was to slip back into the room from which he had come.

Yet Frank was too manly for that. He felt that he had no reason for shame, and he nerved himself boldly for the unpleasant interview before him.

Yet Mr. Clark did not look very angry. There was a half smile on his face, as his eyes fell upon the altered appearance of the boy.

Mr. Tanner slyly dropped the whip which he held, and came forward with a great show of politeness.

"Glad to see you ag'in, Mr. Clark," he ejaculated. "Weren't no use for yer comin' back though, az I'd been sure to send the lad round, 'cordin' to promise."

"But perhaps I may not want him around," answered Mr. Clark.

Mrs. Tanner sunk into a chair at this, while Frank clinched his hands in quiet determination to get a position somewhere.

"We want straightforward, energetic, well-trained boys," continued the merchant. "Now I am sorry to say that I just caught your boy in a fight with a party of ragamuffins. Rolling in the mud with them, Mr. Tanner. Of course that kind of a boy won't suit us."

"My boy Frank fightin'!" cried Mr. Tanner. "Why, ther's no fight in him. Speak up for yerself, Frank. Tell this gentleman as it must ha' been some other little cove."

Mr. Clark waited curiously for Frank's answer.

"That would be telling a lie, father," answered the boy, quietly. "Mr. Clark is right. I was fighting."

Mr. Tanner darted an angry look at Frank, as if he felt that this was more truthfulness than was called for.

"What were you fighting about?" asked his mother, sure that Frank must have a good reason.

"I got into it, and I had to go through with it," replied Frank. "I wish you wouldn't say any more about it. Mr. Clark is not interested."

"I would like to know what it was all about, Frank," remarked that gentleman.

"It was a private matter," answered Frank decidedly. "I am very sorry, Mr. Clark, for I'd like to be in your store. But I can't tell you what that fight was about."

"Why don't you tell the gentleman, you young fool?" cried Mr. Tanner harshly.

"There is no need," Mr. Clark quietly rejoined. "I know already."

"You know?" exclaimed Frank, starting up eagerly.

"Yes, my lad, and I honor you for your silence. I made those boys tell me the cause of the trouble, and find you were only seeking to prevent your brother from being pummeled. Why, Frank, I would have fought myself, on a less provocation. But how came you there alone? What became of your brother?"

"I—I don't—" hesitated Frank. "I guess he was hurt, and got away."

"Was it that young villain, Tom?" broke in Mr. Tanner hotly. "Out with it, Frank. He got you into a fight and then ran away? Come out, boy, square and honest."

"Oh, never mind!" answered Frank uneasily. "Tom didn't mean no harm, I know. He must have been hurt. Mr. Clark don't want to hear our family matters."

Mr. Clark made no answer. He rose from his seat, took his hat from the table, and carefully adjusted it upon his head. He then walked to the door, which stood open. Reaching the door, he turned and fixed his eyes on Frank.

"Get your hat, my boy," he said. "I want you to take a little walk with me."

It need not be said that Frank leaped from dejection into hope at these words. In an in-

stant he had his hat, and was at Mr. Clark's elbow.

The latter, with a courtly bow to Frank's parents, led the way down-stairs, and through the streets, the lad walking half behind him.

Frank had imagined that Mr. Clark's purpose was to have a private talk with him, but to his surprise the gentleman did not utter a word, but walked steadily on, through street after street, until he reached the store from which Frank had been so curtly dismissed only a day or two before.

Mr. Clark led up through the store to the private office of the firm, Frank soberly following. Mr. Thompson sat there alone, and looked up inquiringly as they entered.

Mr. Clark took a seat, quietly removed his hat and gloves, and ran his fingers easily through his hair.

"You have brought the boy, I see," remarked Mr. Thompson.

"Oh yes," answered Mr. Clark quietly. "This is our new store boy, Thompson. We will give him a chance to learn the business."

Frank's heart leaped with joy.

"Very well," rejoined Mr. Thompson. "Take a turn through the place, my boy, and see how you like the looks of things. You can begin your work to-morrow morning."

Frank hesitated, while his face flushed.

"Well, Frank, what is it?" asked Mr. Clark.

"Excuse me," faltered Frank, "but business is business. It is only the question of salary, sir. You know, Mr. Clark, that we are poor, and I must make some money."

"Why, the grasping little rogue!" laughed Mr. Thompson. "We can't play it off on him, Clark. Very well, my lad, we will give you three dollars per week for the first year. Or we may increase it if you are very useful. Will that satisfy your greediness?"

"Oh yes! Thank you, sir!" cried Frank gladly. "That's as much as I am worth, but I will try and do my best."

He hurried out of the door and into the bustling establishment.

"Looks to me like a good boy," remarked Mr. Thompson.

"He is a treasure," answered Mr. Clark with energy. "As manly a little fellow as I have ever seen. And business to the back-bone."

He proceeded to describe the fight which had so nearly ruined Frank's chance of a situation.

CHAPTER VIII.

A YEAR OF SERVICE.

WE must pass rapidly over the events of a year, succeeding the date in which the two boys chose their life professions. It was a busy and eventful year for both, though we cannot do more than glance at its events.

Frank speedily established himself as a polite, obliging and industrious lad, thoroughly honest, and giving promise of making a good salesman. As yet, of course, he was only errand boy and general doer of odds and ends about the establishment. But one may make himself a character for doing things well even as an errand boy; and Frank was so prompt, intelligent and willing, that he became a general favorite, and ere long was trusted by Mr. Clark with commissions of some importance.

Yet he was not without his enemies. The boy was independent, and often spoke quickly where it would have been best for him to keep silent. One man in particular, a salesman who was disposed to be tyrannical and overbearing with boys, roused the old Adam in Frank, and got curt answers to his rude orders, until he came to have a special dislike to the boy. But being cowardly at heart, as tyrants are apt to be, he kept his feeling very much to himself, waiting his opportunity. We mention this here, as it was destined to make mischief yet for Frank.

While Frank Tanner was thus advancing in his chosen profession, his evil disposed brother was making an equal progress in his.

Bandy Ben introduced him into a peculiar society of which he was a prominent member, the declared objects of which society were to prey upon all the rest of the community. The old rogues' proverb, "get money; honestly, if possible; but get money," was surpassed by the doctrine of this association. "Get money," was its only axiom. All idea of honesty was left out of the question.

It had its degrees, ranging upward from those of pickpocket and sneak thief, to the higher honors of burglar, counterfeiter, bank-breaker, and, as some averred, stock-broker, lobbyist and Member of Congress. But not speaking for

the higher grades of the profession, we must confine our attention to that in which Bandy Ben had made himself prominent, the lucrative lines of pickpocket and sneak-thief.

In this direction the young reprobate was exceedingly expert, and could empty pockets, and slip into carelessly-guarded houses, with a celerity and success that made him the envy of his less expert associates. It was nothing uncommon for them to be caught in the exercise of their art, and be sent to prison for a year or two's repentance. But Bandy Ben had yet escaped the clutches of the guardians of the law, and nothing gave him more pure enjoyment than to see some of his awkward associates nabbed by the police.

Tom Tanner knew well the life he was taking up, when he obeyed the summons of the skilled young thief to accompany him to his haunts. But Tom was irredeemably bad at heart. Mrs. Tanner had done her best to instill virtuous sentiments into the two boys, but her teachings were thrown away on the elder of the two, who eagerly caught up all the vile lessons to be learned from the boys in the street.

Thus it did not require much argument to persuade Tom Tanner to be a thief. He was utterly devoid of conscience, and he only wanted to be assured by Bandy Ben that it was safe and would pay, to throw all shreds of honesty overboard.

It is true that the effects of early teaching cannot be thrown off instantly, and Tom did feel some slight compunctions at his first lessons under his skilled tutor. But this feeling did not last, and he was soon hardened enough to steal the pennies from a starving beggar, without a care as to what became of his victim.

And theft was not the only accomplishment of Bandy Ben. He prided himself on being able to smoke more tobacco and drink more whisky than any boy of his age in the community. And he was as skilled in cheating at card play as any Mississippi gambler. So it may be surmised that Tom Tanner was in very promising hands.

We must drop in upon the two boys at the end of their first year of duty, to see how they have progressed in that period. A year has made a marked change in Frank's appearance. He has grown taller and stouter, while his face has become very handsome and intelligent. He is nearly the sole support of his parents, for his father is no fonder of work than of yore, and spends the greater part of his time in a favorite gin shop, where he manages to git rid of what little money he earns. But he treats Frank better than of old, and can find no words strong enough to express his opinion of his absent son, Tom.

"Haven't you never seen the young rascal-lion, nowhere, while yer scootin' round town?" he asked Frank, one morning, as the latter was about to set off for the store.

"No, sir," replied Frank. "I often look for him but I have never seen him."

"Blame his thunderin' eyes, I'd like to git hold on him ag'in. I didn't give him half a sockdolagin' that day that he kicked out. I'd jist like to finish it."

"Ain't you too hard on poor Tom?" asked Frank, somewhat hurt. "He wasn't any worse than the other boys, and most of them are getting to be good fellows now. Why, I've often been as ugly and as wild as Tom myself."

"You?" cried Mrs. Tanner, with an incredulous laugh. "You ugly and wild? Why, you don't know what you are talking about, child."

"I am not quite an angel," laughed Frank, as he put on his hat.

"Oh, you git out!" cried Mr. Tanner. "Don't stand there palaverin'. You couldn't bring sweet butter out of Tom Tanner, if you was to churn away for a whole year. He's all butter-milk, that chap; and the sourest kind."

Yet, if the truth were known, the main source of Mr. Tanner's anger against Tom was that he had ceased to be a source of income. He might be as rascally as he pleased, for all Jacob Tanner would have cared, if he only supplied the Tanner exchequer with funds.

Frank made his way to the store. He had been home to a very scanty dinner, and was back again for his afternoon service.

"Stir up, boy," cried one of the salesmen. "Mr. Thompson was just out looking for you."

"Ah!" said Frank regretfully, "some errand, I suppose. I thought I would get done sorting those plaids before I went out again. But I judge there's no help for it."

"Let the plaids rust. You can't do two things at once. You have too many irons in the fire, Frank. There's no use for you to make work. They'll make enough for you."

"Oh! I like to be pottering around," laughed Frank. "I don't find that it's pulling me down much, or spoiling my appetite."

He made his way cheerfully to the counting-room. Mr. Thompson was not there, and Frank pushed on to the door of the private office.

"Come in," was the answer to his knock.

"Oh! it is you, Frank," said Mr. Thompson, who was there alone.

"I was told in the store that you wanted me," answered Frank.

"I?—Oh! yes, so I did; but I sent Harry. But, since you are here, Frank, you may take this package of papers for me to Mr. Brown, at Sargent & Co.'s wool house. And—have you a pocket book?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then put this twenty-dollar bill into it. Take the cars and run up to Tenth street and Sixth Avenue. There's a bill of eighteen dollars and twenty cents due Yates, the pork dealer there, on my private account. Be sure you get a receipt from him."

"I always do that," answered Frank, as he left the room to execute his commission.

He walked briskly to Sargent & Co.'s store, and left the package there as directed. This establishment was a considerable distance up town, and Frank thought it hardly worth while to take the cars for his other errand.

"I can walk there about as quick," he said to himself, "and I suppose I ought to save money for the firm wherever I can."

Yet it is often best to obey orders strictly, as he found to his cost.

There was some excitement in a street through which he was passing. A considerable group of men and boys had gathered, and Frank hurried up, curious to learn what was the matter.

Pushing into the crowd he found that a horse had fallen, and the driver was making vain efforts to get him on his feet again without taking off his harness.

Frank stood for a few minutes, looking on. But the thought came to him that his time was not his own, and that he was not hired to superintend the raising of fallen horses. Just as he turned away there came a slight pressure in the crowd and he felt himself inconveniently squeezed.

With a jerk he released himself, and pushed out to the edge of the throng. Some impulse then induced him to look back, and his eye caught, in the midst of the crowd, the well-remembered face of his brother Tom. Yet it was not Tom as he remembered him. The face had grown older, and had a peculiar expression which Frank did not like. But his old feeling for his brother came back at the sight of Tom's face, and he pushed quickly back, calling out:

"Hey, Tom! Hold up, old fellow. It is me—Frank. Hold up. I want to see you."

Perhaps Tom did not want to see him. At any rate, when Frank had reached the center of the crowd his brother had disappeared, and he could not get another glimpse of him.

"That was mighty shabby in Tom," and Frank drew out into the street again much disappointed. "He couldn't help hearing me. Maybe, though, he is ashamed for having stayed away so long. I thought I'd find out what he is doing and try to coax him home again."

Frank walked on thinking he might catch another glimpse of Tom. But in vain he looked on every side, there was no vision of the familiar face.

A few minutes now brought him to the provision store to which he had been sent.

"I have some money for you, Mr. Yates," he said. "From Mr. Thompson. How much is your bill against him?"

"Which Thompson?" asked the Dutch butcher.

"Shon Thompson from Fifth avenue?"

"That's the man."

"He owe me eighteen dollars mit twenty cents," answered Mr. Yates, consulting his books.

"That's right. Here's your cash. Please write me a receipt."

Frank plunged his hand into his pocket, but a look of blank astonishment came upon his face as the hand came up empty. He felt quickly in his other pockets; they, too, were empty. With growing alarm, he felt all his pockets again, but vainly. The pocket-book was gone.

"What's wrong?" asked the butcher. "You no got the money?"

"I had it," answered poor Frank, "but it is gone. I must have forgot and left it at the store."

"Don't know that," remarked the Dutchman. "Good many pockpickets 'bout here. You stop anywhere's coming?"

Frank's heart sunk as he remembered the in-

cident of the fallen horse. He faltered out an acknowledgment of his curiosity.

"Yaw. That's it. You git right back and tell Shon Thompson. He's one fool to be sending money mit boys."

Frank was very much depressed as he made his way slowly back to the store. It was not only the loss of the money, though that was bad enough. But he could not help connecting Tom's sudden appearance and disappearance with the theft, and his heart sunk accordingly.

At that very moment, in fact, two individuals were watching him from a distant corner, and these were no other than his dissolute brother and Bandy Ben.

"He looks mighty down in the mouth," remarked Tom. "But that's nothin'. Them chaps at the store think he's ice-cream on pound cake. I bet you high I take the starch out of him before he's much older. He ain't goin' to lord it over me with his high airs."

"Did you nab the flimsy?" asked Bandy.

"You bet."

"How much?"

"A cool twenty."

"Jolly. Let's have a go of oysters. I'll stand half, out of my share of the split."

While the young thieves were thus preparing to divide their plunder Frank made his way back to the store.

He looked very dejected as he confessed to Mr. Thompson the loss of the money. The merchant gazed at him for some moments in silence.

"Did you take the cars?" he asked at length.

"No, sir."

"But I told you to."

"I didn't mind walking, sir, and thought I would save the expense."

"Oh! you did, eh? You've paid pretty well for your unasked economy. It would have been cheaper to obey orders."

"Yes, sir," faltered Frank, hanging his head.

"I hope you will take it out of my wages a little at a time, sir. I'd like to pay it right off, but we've got to live, sir."

"Oh! you want me to take it out of your wages?"

"I'd be much obliged if you would, sir. And I know I'll be more careful another time. I've had such good luck that it has made me careless."

"Very well, Frank. I guess you need the lesson. If you have a weekly reminder of the necessity of carefulness, it may be worth all it costs. I will deduct a half-dollar a week from your wages till it is all paid. Here is another twenty-dollar bill. Go back and pay Mr. Yates."

"Hadn't you better send somebody else, sir?"

"No, Frank. But take care you don't make your bill forty instead of twenty dollars."

Frank left the room with a sense of joy in his heart. He was evidently trusted yet.

"You are too hard on the boy for his first fault, Thompson," said Mr. Clark.

"Not a bit. It is a useful lesson. Twenty dollars now may save him hundreds in the future."

"That's so. I was thinking of the poverty of the family."

"Well, Christmas is close at hand. We will make it up to them in a present. Not of money, though. Old Tanner would make drakes and ducks of that in a hurry."

CHAPTER IX.

RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL SON.

THE loss of the twenty-dollar bill had certainly not injured Frank's position in the store. In fact, at the commencement of the new year his salary was raised one dollar per week, and though the half dollar weekly was regularly taken off, its amount was more than covered by a present of clothing which the firm had made to him on Christmas.

His duties also were somewhat changed, and he was given opportunities as a salesman.

"You are getting along, Frank," said Mr. Clark to him. "We shall soon need a boy to take your place in the store. I fancy you must be getting above the position of errand boy."

"I am willing to do any thing you wish, sir."

"No doubt. But I think you have it in you to make a salesman. I shall have to hire somebody else to run errands and carry the key, and so give you a half hour's extra sleep in the mornings."

Frank, in fact, had recently carried the key of the store, and was obliged to be there earliest in the morning, to open it out for the porters.

At almost the same moment in which the brief conversation took place, Tom Tanner and Bandy Ben were seated together in the room of

a house in one of the most disreputable parts of the city.

The apartment looked as if twenty generations of well-smeared hands had gone over its walls, while the cobwebs of a century depended from its grimy ceiling. But little that mattered to the half-dozen of young reprobates who were gathered around its well-battered center table, each with a rusty-looking clay pipe between his lips, from which clouds of smoke ascended through the air.

On the table was a whisky bottle and some deeply nicked glasses, while Tom and Bandy Ben were amusing themselves with a very greasy pack of cards. Money lay on the table between them, and they were evidently gambling away the proceeds of their last robbery.

"You done that job neat as wax-works, last night," remarked Bandy, as he sent a cloud of smoke through his nose. "I never see'd a feller as took to things as quick as you, Tom. I'll say that. My eye, didn't the old joskin squeal, when you tipped his cady and forked his dough! He kicked wuss nor a ten-year old colt. And sich an innercent dove as you was! Bless yer jolly eyes, it did me good!" and Bandy laughed with great unction.

"It ain't a-goin' to last long," growled Tom, "if you keep on havin' sich luck at the cards. I'm goin' to give up cards, Bandy, fur you always salt me."

"You've got to learn the keerds, like you larnt forking," Bandy coolly replied, as he shuffled the dirty pack. "Cut 'em, my cove, and see if you can't cut yerself luck."

"Yes, fiddlers' luck," grumbled Tom, as he looked at his hand. "I b'lieve you put up the papers on me, Bandy."

"Say that ag'in and I'll smash your snoot!" cried Bandy angrily. "Why, I couldn't put up the papers no more nor a baby. Play yer keerds now, and don't be glowerin' there like a monkey, or I'll pepper your peepers anyhow."

Bandy set his hat fiercely to one side of his head, and gave an extra roll to his sleeves. The young reprobates who were looking on at the game drew slightly back. Those movements usually meant fight with Bandy, and they expected to see a sharp tussle between the two gamblers.

But Tom had no stomach for a fight, and began moodily to play his hand. Bandy, seeing that there was no present chance for a row, followed suit, and the game recommenced. It continued for half an hour longer, at the end of which time the veteran gambler had emptied Tom's pockets to the last penny.

"Lawsee! ye ain't wiped out a'ready?" cried Bandy. "Afore the fun's half started? Why, yer not wuth yer weight in oats. I allers told ye you couldn't play with yer uncle. Git out now, and let some o' these here chaps peg in. Pile up, Sandy; I want to see the color of that stake you struck on the old moll lay. Yer sich a lucky dog with the ladies."

"I'm your hoss," answered the red-headed fellow he had called Sandy. "I'll buckle you. And I'll bet a red you can't warp me as easy as you did Tom."

"Dry up and tackle the keerds," growled Bandy Ben. "Ye've got blow enough to set a windmill goin'. It's all chance anyhow, every blamed fool knows that. It's all the run of the papers, and ye've got as much show as I have."

As he spoke he was skillfully manipulating the cards, and putting them just where he wanted them, with such art that it would not have been easy to detect him.

Tom, a little sore at his losses, took a deep drink from the bottle, with all the vim of an old toper, and seated himself gloomily with his pipe in a corner of the room, the fiery liquor having no more seeming effect upon him than so much water.

Meanwhile Bandy was diminishing the ill-gotten gains of his new antagonist as readily as he had fleeced Tom of his spare cash.

Tom continued gloomy all the afternoon, though he frequently applied himself to the bottle as if with the hope of raising his spirits. The consequence was that when he and Bandy sallied forth together after nightfall, Tom was considerably the worse for the liquor he had swallowed, though his well-seasoned companion was a steady as a clock.

"What's the lay to-night, my lovely buzzer?" queried Bandy, as he rolled along in his sailor-like fashion.

"Don't know. The honest lay, I guess," growled Tom angrily. "There's thunderin' little use gettin' a chap's neck in a string, and you a-saltin' all his funds with the cards. It's pretty nigh played out, Bandy."

"Why, ye growlin' little baboon, I never

made ye play!" roared Bandy. "It's yer own doin's, right from the shoulder. Hang yer squint-eyed profile if it's dough ye want here's yer provender. And shet up."

Tom was rather astonished when Bandy offered him a handful of money. The cunning young thief had the credit of winning two-thirds of the illegal gains of his associates, and keeping it. There was even a tradition among them that Bandy Ben had a neat deposit at some bank. Others claimed that he never did any stealing himself, that he always had some light-fingered partner who took the risk, while Bandy shared the spoils, or else won them all at card play. He was the banker and broker of the pickpocket fraternity.

It may be imagined, then, that Tom was rather surprised to receive a present of cash from his tight-fisted associate. He looked at him with a sense that there must be something behind all this.

Nor was it long before Bandy revealed his hand.

"I s'pose yer still keepin' an eye on that 'ristocratic brother of yourn," he casually remarked.

"You bet," answered Tom.

"Still forks the jigger, I s'pose?"

"What's that?" asked Tom.

"Burn yer consarned ign'rance, don't ye understand good English? Is a chap got to chaw dictionary with ye? Does the bloke carry the key of the store, that's what?"

"Oh!" cried Tom, with a meaning glance. "That's the lay, eh? Well, if he don't there's no snakes, that's all."

Bandy rested himself contentedly against a lamp-post, and scratched his head leisurely while a party of young men were passing by.

"That's the lay, Tom," he said, when the coast was again clear. "You and me's been wires long enough. It's time we was gettin' above gooseberry lays. I've got an ambition fur a rise in the perfession, Tom. I've got it in me to be a gin'yine night worker, and to hit fur big stakes."

"But what's that got to do with the key?" asked Tom, suspiciously.

"Jist you nab it, that's all."

"Can't do it. It's no admission ag'in' me in them diggin's. They'd kick me out if I showed a nose there."

Bandy took off his hat to scratch his head the easier. Then he shut his left eye cunningly, and put a finger alongside of his nose.

"Can't ye investergate yer dad?" he queried. "He's likkerin' now at Micky Flynn's. Why, ye kin git right to the old coon's heart if ye prime him well with red-eye. And—but I don't s'pose it's necessary fur me to put brains in yer thinkin' box. I've gin ye the idee. Ye kin work it up yer own way."

Tom stood thinking for a moment, then he burst out:

"I've got the idee, Bandy. You slide, I'll do it. I'm bound to git even with Frank Tanner."

An hour afterward Tom walked slyly into a low rum-shop, kept by a gentleman of Celtic origin named Michael Flynn. The boy looked inquiringly around the circle of hard drinkers there assembled. In a distant corner of the room he espied the well-known figure of his father, sitting alone at a table, and looking very disconsolately into an empty tumbler that stood before him.

Jacob Tanner explored his pockets with the forlorn hope that nature might at last have done her duty by him, and planted a miniature gold mine in one of these pockets. But in vain; nature had not done her duty in that way, and he again looked into his glass with the hope that some fairy might have refilled it.

"What you lookin' for, dad?"

The old fellow's eyes were quickly lifted. There before him, as coolly as if he had parted but yesterday, sat his prodigal son, with a year of growth on his form, and five years of experience on his face. Mr. Tanner's first sensation was one of anger.

"Why, you imperdent little devil's varlet, so you think you kin walk in here and brazen me out, do you?" roared the father. "Git now! Instanter! Or I'll go for you wuss nor a cat ever went for cow's milk. I never want to look on your dirty physiog ag'in."

"Hold yer hosses, dad," said Tom, affectionately. "It don't pay to kick too quick in the traces. What'll you imbibe? I've got the needful, you bet," and he made the silver clank in his pocket. "Hey, landlord, stir yer stumps over this way. What's yer likker, dad?"

The indignant parent looked at his son, while the angry expression slowly died out from his

face. Something like a smile appeared on his mouth, like the moon showing out for an instant among storm-clouds. He drummed restlessly on the table.

"Come, dad," repeated Tom. "There's no use stirrin' up old sores. What'll ye drink?"

Jacob hesitated for a minute more, and then said in a very low tone:

"Whisky, straight."

Tom had conquered. The magic of silver had softened the soul of the indignant parent.

We will not dwell on the scene that followed. It is no pleasant spectacle to see a son plying his father with drink, nor to see a mere boy swallowing strong liquor with almost the ease of a case-hardened old toper.

Suffice it to say that at the end of an hour or two Jacob Tanner rose from his seat much the worse for drink. Tom, who had been careful not to drink too much, hastened to support him as he staggered against the table.

"Yer a boy arter my own heart!" hiccupped the father, while he threw his arm over Tom's shoulder. "Yer wuth a million of milk-sops like yer brother Frank, who'd see me as dry as a Jersey sand-hill afore he'd give me the vally of a toddy. Yer the apple of my eye, Tommy, and they couldn't git a word ag'in' ye outen me if they'd take tongs."

He reeled along the street under Tom's guidance. He was very drunk even for him.

"Don't let out you seen me, dad," cautioned Tom. "There's no use lettin' 'em know where you met yer angel."

"Me let out!" cried the father, with a drunken wink. "Hope yer don't s'pose yer old dad's a fool, and ain't had his eye-teeth cut? Nary time, Tommy, my son."

Tom left his father at the door of his domicile and glided quickly away. The old drunkard made his way with difficulty up-stairs, stumbling at every step. He finally reached the door of his room and began to fumble in his pocket for the key.

"Shoot my buttons if I don't believe I've lost it!" he muttered, as he explored pocket after pocket. "Know I put it in yere, but the rancorous thing's gone. Mebbe I dropped it on them stairs." He made his way to the head of the stairs and looked down. He tottered as he clung to the head of the balusters. "There so ridiklous oneven," he grumbled. "And they's got sich a way o' kickin' up, 's if they was put on pivots. Carpenters nowadays don't know how to build stairs, I reckon. Let them thunderin' old keys go! I could get it well enough, only I don't want to 'sturb folks. 'Tain't 'cause I can't naver gate down stairs."

He beat a tattoo on the door loud enough to waken up all the establishment.

"It's only me, Mrs. Tanner," he whispered through the door. "Don't ye make no noise 'cause I don't want to 'sturb nobody."

After a minute the door was opened from the inside.

"Drunk as a beast!" exclaimed Mrs. Tanner, angrily. "And making noise enough to rouse up the whole block. Where is your key?"

"Oh, bless your eyes, I forgot the key!" and he commenced again to fumble in his pocket, quite oblivious of the fact that he had searched in vain for it before.

"Oh, come in!" cried Mrs. Tanner, indignantly, taking him by the collar and pulling him through the doorway. "I don't see where you got all your liquor."

"Now jist shet up, Mrs. Tanner. I won't take none of your slack."

The door closed. A sharp click of the dead latch was heard. The Tanner household was shut in for the night.

CHAPTER X.

BREAKERS AHEAD.

THAT same night, at a later hour, another person came in at the door of the Tanner household. It was Frank, who had been keeping unusually late hours for him.

"Don't disturb yourself, mother," he cried, as he heard a movement in the next room. "It's only me."

"Why, you're very late, Frank. Where in the world have you been?"

"I went to the theater," answered Frank.

"I made a little extra money to-day, and as it's my birthday I thought I'd have a treat."

"That's right, Frank. I hope you had a very good time. What o'clock is it?"

"Just twelve. There's the clock striking now."

Mrs. Tanner listened and distinctly heard the bell of a neighboring clock strike three times. The first nine strokes of the twelve had passed unheeded by her.

"It sounds to me like three," she said. "Very well. Go to bed, and happy dreams to you."

Soon all was silent. Another hour passed, and then a peculiar fumbling was heard at the door, and the sound of stealthy footsteps in the room. This ceased and all grew still again.

For two or three hours afterward silence continued, and then the same peculiar sounds returned. It was a ghostlike movement, a rustling to and fro and the fall of muffled feet. No one awakened, and after a few minutes the room sunk to its former quiet.

It was late the next morning when the family awoke. Frank and his father had kept such late hours, and Mrs. Tanner had been so much disturbed during the night that they all overslept themselves.

"Mercy on us! here it's near eight o'clock!" cried Frank. "I can't take more than a bite, mother. I must be off, or I'll have everybody waiting for me at the store door."

By the time he had eaten a slice or two of bread and butter his father made his appearance, looking much the worse for his debauch of the night before.

"Bless me if my brains ain't swimming 'round in my head jist like a nest of bumbly bees," he muttered. "I b'lieve they put some drugs in the ale nowadays. Nobody ever heerd of one glass of ale settin' a man's head afloat in the old times. I really don't know what the world's a-comin' to. It's bad 'nough to drug vittals, but when they come to druggin' drink it's too confounded ridiklous."

He fumbled around the room, after drenching his head plentifully with cold water.

"Hey, wife! did you take that there key outen my pocket last night?"

"No. You said you lost it."

"Well, it's here on the table. Must have forgot and laid it down when I come in," he muttered. "Blame if I don't swear off ag'in' ale. It's gittin' too much body in it nowadays for my narves."

Frank, paying little attention to this monologue, hurried through his scanty breakfast, seized his cap, and drove hastily through the door with a cheery "Good-morning." He did not like the idea of being late.

In fact, on arriving at the store, he found the two porters and one of the salesmen waiting for him at the door.

"Why, come, little lazy-head, this won't do," exclaimed the latter, jokingly. "You'll check all the wheels of business if you're going to make love to your pillow at that rate."

"They'll run the faster when they get started," answered Frank gayly.

He took the key from his pocket and opened the store door, admitting the waiting men. It was near the hour for business, and very soon other salesmen and clerks came in. It was about nine o'clock when Mr. Thompson entered the store.

On doing so he noticed a peculiar commotion among the persons present. They were gathered into a group, excitedly talking, while several of them appeared to be examining cases of goods.

"What is the matter?" he asked, walking briskly up to them. "What is your interesting subject of conversation, Mr. Gorman?"

The person addressed looked quickly around.

"Oh! I am glad you are here, Mr. Thompson. I was about to send you a message."

"Why, what has happened?"

"The store was robbed last night."

At this startling information Mr. Thompson drew hastily back.

"The saints!" he cried. "Robbed?"

"Yes. We don't know how much is taken yet, but several valuable rolls of goods are missing. You see this case of Lyons silks. This was the first thing we noticed. It has been opened, and two packages of goods taken."

"Bless me!" exclaimed the alarmed merchant. "This must be looked into at once. Have the store thoroughly examined, Mr. Gorman. See what is missing."

"I have them at it now, sir."

"And—let me see. Well, you will do, Mr. Wilson. Go down to police head-quarters as quickly as possible, and have them send up one of their best detectives."

"What for?" asked Mr. Clark, who had just entered.

"Eh! You here, Clark? I'm glad you've come, for we want all our wits this morning. The store was entered and robbed last night."

Mr. Clark heard this with much less excitement than his partner had shown.

"Robbed, eh? That's pleasant, I declare. Much taken, Thompson?"

Mr. Thompson shook his head gloomily. He pointed to the open case of silks.

"Bad, I fear. Very bad. We don't know the worst yet."

"Then the sooner we know the worst the better," exclaimed Mr. Clark with energy. "If we are to worry over it let us have the worry in a lump, and done with."

"You worry?" retorted Mr. Thompson, with a sense of amusement. "Why, I don't believe you'd worry if they carried away the house over your head, so that they left you the clothes you stood in. You're too provokingly cool."

"All right. It's my way," answered Clark easily. "You have sent for an officer?"

"Yes."

"If I don't fret, I'll go for the thieves all the same," and Mr. Clark hurried back to the office, to put on his office-coat.

Thompson looked after him with some envy.

"He's a regular Mark Tapley," he said; "happy under discouraging circumstances. Hang it all! there's such a thing as being too cool, and Clark's one of that kind. I don't believe anything short of a toothache would stir his nerves, and that would waken up an iceberg."

In about half an hour Mr. Wilson returned with the detective. He was called into the private office, where the members of the firm awaited him.

"Have you found out the amount of loss?" he asked, after some preliminary conversation.

"Yes. Here is an inventory. It is not as much as we feared, but the goods taken are all valuable."

"Hum!" muttered the officer, looking over the list. "The rogues could not have had very good carrying arrangements, or they would not have been so easily satisfied. Do you know how they entered?"

"We left that for you. The men have looked around some, but can find no sign of a breaking in."

"Very well," answered the officer briskly. "I will walk through the building and see what I can make of it. Can this gentleman guide me?"

"Yes, you go with him, Wilson."

The officer walked in his brisk way into the store, and commenced a thorough examination of the premises, under the guidance of Mr. Wilson.

The cases from which goods had been taken were closely examined, and then he proceeded to study the various possible modes of entrance to the building, looking at every door and window with critical eyes. A half-hour and more was spent in this round, after which he returned to the office.

"Well?" asked Mr. Thompson, nervously, after the officer had quietly seated himself.

"Green hands," he answered, in a decided tone. "Not a professional job. Lucky for you that they were only apprentices, or you would have fared worse."

"Have you found how they got in?"

"I am pretty sure how they got out. The goods were taken through the bolted door that leads to the rear street. But they did not enter that way. Who carries the key of the store?"

"Oh!" cried Mr. Thompson, hastily. "That is in safe hands. Our store boy has it. But we would not have trusted him with it, only that he is such a thoroughly honest little fellow."

"No doubt," answered the officer, dryly. "They are all honest till they are found out."

"We have every confidence in this boy," said Mr. Clark, quietly.

"I haven't said that he was a thief," rejoined the officer. "All I can say is that the thieves came in through that door, opened by that key, if I am not sadly mistaken. Is this boy in the store?"

"Yes, sir."

"Send for him."

There was a slight nervousness in both members of the firm as they awaited Frank's coming. They were very favorably disposed toward the lad, and could not help feeling troubled by this opinion of the officer.

Frank entered. He, too, was somewhat nervous, and failed to display his usual earnest, straightforward manner. He hung his head slightly. The fact that he carried the key, and some remarks which he had heard in the store, troubled him.

The officer bent his cold gray eye on the boy, as he stood with heightened color before him. Frank's glance shifted from one to the other.

"Do you want me, Mr. Thompson?" he asked.

"Yes. This gentleman wishes to speak to you."

"Where do you live?" asked the detective.

Frank told him.

"Hum! Not a savory quarter. You carry the key of this store?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where do you keep it at night?"

"I never let it go out of my pocket."

"And do you talk about it? Do the rest of the folks in that establishment know that you have charge of it?"

"No indeed, sir. Mr. Clark told me to keep that to myself, and I always do."

"Was it in your pocket last night?"

"Yes, sir. I found it there this morning."

"What time did you get in last night?"

"Twelve o'clock, sir."

"Twelve o'clock, Frank?" exclaimed Mr. Thompson. "Do you keep such hours as that?"

"Not usually, Mr. Thompson. Yesterday was my birthday, and I went to the theater."

"Ah!" asked the officer quickly. "Was any one with you?"

"I went alone," replied Frank. "But one of the gentlemen in the store saw me there. Mr. Parsons, sir."

"Send for Mr. Parsons," said the officer. He was becoming favorably impressed, despite himself, by Frank's manner.

The person sent for entered. He was a little man, with sandy whiskers, and a very set cast of features.

"Were you at the theater last night, Mr. Parsons? At what house was it, Frank?" asked Mr. Thompson.

"Wallack's, sir."

"I was not there," answered Mr. Parsons, coolly.

"What?" cried Frank, turning to him with flushed face. "Why, I saw you there, Mr. Parsons. And you saw me. You looked straight at me, and not ten feet away."

His tone was very indignant.

"The boy is mistaken," replied Mr. Parsons, coldly. "It must have been somebody who looked like me. I was not there."

"Why you wore that very pin!" exclaimed Frank. "And you saw me too! You know you saw me, Mr. Parsons!"

"Did I?" answered the man, with a cold smile. "Do you want me any longer, Mr. Thompson? I don't care to bandy words with the boy."

"No. That will do."

Parsons walked quietly away, Frank looking after him with a bewildered expression. He was sure that he had seen him. But there was one thing he did not know; that Parsons was a bitter enemy of his. He was the person to whom he referred in a previous chapter.

The officer looked keenly at Frank, who had laid his hand on the back of a chair, and was gazing with disturbed eyes after the disappearing salesman.

"That will do," remarked the officer. "You can go now."

Frank slightly started, looked at the members of the firm as if thinking that they might have something to say, and then quickly left the room.

"Well?" said Mr. Thompson, with a glance of inquiry at the officer.

"I hardly know what to think of that boy," answered the latter, shaking his head. "He seems honest and straightforward. But facts are the stuff, gentlemen; hard facts. See that he does not leave the store. I must have a search-warrant, and look into his place of residence. Something may turn up there."

An hour afterward the officer entered the Tanner domicile. Mr. and Mrs. Tanner were both present, and looked inquiringly at their unknown visitor.

"You have a son named Frank Tanner?"

"Bless yer eyes, yes! In course we have," replied Mr. Tanner heartily.

"Was he out late last night?"

"Not that I knows on. He ain't a bit given that way."

"He was at the theater," answered Mrs. Tanner. "But why do you want to know?"

"What time did he get home?" asked the officer, without heed to her question.

"At twelve o'clock."

"How do you know that?"

"Why, I heard the clock strike."

"Ah! You heard the clock strike twelve?"

"Why, no," a little confusedly. "I only heard it strike three times, but Frank said it struck twelve."

A quick flash came into the officer's eyes.

"So! You heard it strike three, and he said it struck twelve. You trust Frank then more than you do your own ears, Mrs. Tanner?"

"Why—why, yes. I only heard the last of it. But what is the matter?"

"I fear the boy has been in mischief," was the cold answer. "I have a warrant to search these rooms."

"For what?" asked Mr. Tanner hastily.

"For anything that don't belong here," replied the officer, as he at once proceeded to put his warrant in execution.

The search did not last long. It took but a few minutes to examine the two sparsely furnished rooms. But he drew from under Frank's bed a long flat package neatly sewed up in linen.

Mrs. Tanner's eyes opened as the officer quietly drew his penknife and cut the stitches of this package. A sheen as of silk appeared through the opening.

"What have you got there?" asked Mr. Tanner, gazing earnestly at the package.

"Stolen goods," was the cold answer. "There was a robbery at Thompson & Clark's store last night. This is part of the proceeds. You can put that and that together if you wish," and the officer walked from the room with the bundle of silk under his arm.

An hour afterward Frank Tanner was taken into custody on the charge of participation in burglary.

CHAPTER XI.

TOM'S TRIUMPH AND FRANK'S DISTRESS.

We must return to a scene which we visited a chapter or two ago, to the haunt of Bandy Ben and his villainous associates.

The group of young pickpockets was seated around the room as we saw them before, smoking and talking in language that had an oath for every third word. Tom Tanner was one of the loudest talkers in the gang. Something seemed to have highly delighted him, and he burst into occasional fits of laughter with no apparent foundation for them.

"What in the blue blazes has become of Bandy?" he ejaculated. "Why, he's slow enough to give a mule the brain fever."

"Waitin' for the 'lection returns, maybe," suggested one of the boys, with a wink. "Bandy's bad struck with politics."

"None of yer larks now, Toppy Jim," cried Tom, angrily. "Your jokes is too salty. Don't you be gettin' them off on me."

"I don't keer half a pipe of 'bacey for you," was the retort.

"If you come rootin' round these diggin's I'll make ye keer, then," and Tom rolled up his sleeves suggestively. "Hello! here's Bandy now. Jist in time to stop Toppy Jim's jaw. What's the news, old poke?"

"Dry up!" was Bandy's very curt answer. "Ye're too curjus. Give a chap time to wash the cobwebs outen his throat."

Not a word more would Bandy utter until he had taken a draught of whisky, filled and lighted his pipe, and fixed himself comfortably in a chair with his heels on the table.

"That's all serene," he remarked, as he sent a whiff of smoke curling toward the ceiling.

"But what is the news?" asked Tom, anxiously.

"Is the police squintin' this a-way? That's the interestin' p'int."

"The perlice!" cried Bandy, with infinite contempt. "Why, bless yer stupid eyes, ye don't s'pose the perlice ever hits the bull's eye till it's pushed right up ag'in' their noses? Ye've only got to make a false trail fur the perlice, and they'll foller it like blind moles. I don't keer a whiff of 'bacey smoke fur the best on 'em."

"They're off the track, then?" asked Tom.

"Didn't I say it? D'ye want me to swear to it?"

"Yer a reg'lar old growler, Bandy. How's the trap worked, that's what I'm arter. How 'bout the little joker, eh?"

"They've nabbed our decoy duck," answered Bandy. "They've snatched that nice brother of yours from baste."

"I knowed it!" cried Tom, throwing up his hat in an enthusiasm of delight. "I told you I'd git even with the proud, stuck-up Sunday-schooler! Him a puttin' on airs, and gitin' me kicked out into the street! I knowed the time'd come to lay out Frank Tanner."

The heartless young villain lay back in his chair and roared with laughter. He seemed overcome with enjoyment at the unpleasant predicament of his brother.

A look of disgust came upon Bandy's face. Bad as he was Tom's behavior was too heartless even for him.

"Belay that!" he growled, "or I'll swipe yer pretty face for ye. Yer a bigger hog nor I thought ye was, Tom Tanner. And ye're a good deal too fresh. Ye'll blow on us next and sell the pass, if ye keep goin' off that way."

Tom, with some effort, reduced his face to sobriety, with a slight sense of shame at having exposed himself to his associates.

"How 'bout the plunder?" asked another of the boys. "What's to be did?"

"Won't do to spring the plant yet," answered Bandy, decidedly. "I've got the fence marked out, but we've got to lay low and keep shady till the wind goes down a bit. Come, lads, who's in funds? I'm tired of buzzin', and feel like shakin' the papers. Let's have a set to," and he produced a pack of cards.

But no one took the bait. That hook had been offered to them too often. They were not in the mood just then to invest all their loose cash in Bandy's bank. He grumbled and cursed at them

for a time, but it had no effect. They would not play, and that was an end to it.

"Send a mule finger, I'd give a penny a cart load for sich fellows. A set of sweet daggers, ye are, aren't ye now? Why blow yer ugly curjus, I've a notion to emigrate and leave ye to hoe yer own pertater patches! Ye wouldn't last much longer 'nough fur a cat to whisk her tail, only ye've got me fur a perlessor of the fine arts, dang yel!"

With which dreadful threat he buried his head in the collar of his extensive coat, and only an occasional growl, and a continuous puffing of smoke, showed that Bandy yet survived beneath his enveloping mask.

At almost the same hour in which this conversation was taking place, a very different scene occurred in another portion of the city.

This was in the office of a police justice, before whom Frank Tanner had been brought to answer the charge of burglary. The members of the firm from whom the robbery had taken place were there, looking much depressed and disappointed. They had felt and placed such confidence in Frank that it was hard to think they had been deceived by this seemingly innocent boy. But the evidence against him seemed incontestable. Mr. and Mrs. Tanner were also present. The mother was completely inconsolable. It was a terrible shock to her to see her dear son arrested for crime. She knew there was a dreadful mistake somewhere, but the poor woman could see no way out of the labyrinth, and it was impossible for her to control her emotion.

As for Jacob Tanner he had taken care to prime himself with drink, and had all the sobriety and coolness of a half-tipsy man. His eyes were fixed on Frank with the severity of a much injured father all whose moral lessons had been in vain.

As for poor Frank, he was in a state of utter bewilderment. He strove to appear calm and self-possessed, but his limbs trembled, and his eyes glistened with unshed tears, which showed the deep emotions stirring within him.

"The boy acknowledges that this key was in his possession all last night, and that he opened the store with it this morning. Is this the key of your store, Mr. Thompson?" asked the justice.

"It is," was the answer, after a brief examination.

"And you trust it in the charge of a mere boy, like this?"

"That is not to the point," replied Mr. Thompson rather angrily. "There is no question of whom we trust and whom we don't. The prisoner had charge of this key."

"Very well; since you are so precise." The justice was a little riled also. He turned to Mr. Tanner:

"How are your rooms fastened at night?"

"With a dead latch," was the reply.

"A dead latch, eh? And who has keys to it?"

"Nobody but me and Frank."

"You live in a tenement-house, you say? Full of other families? Do you never leave the door unlatched, so that some of them could get in, and take the key from your son's pocket?" Evidently the justice was favorably disposed toward Frank.

"Nary time," was the decided answer. "Mrs. Tanner's a very partik'ler woman. Why, she locked me out last night. I had to 'sturb the whole concern to git in."

"Where was your key?"

Mr. Tanner scratched his head a little confusedly. His memory was not very precise on that point.

"Why, see here, judge," he began. "I'd been takin' a little opedeldock last night, for my rheumatiks, and somehow it allers goes to my head. I've been kinder weak-jinted in the brains ever since I fought in the war. Anyhow, when I come to hunt in my pockets for the key last night, it wasn't thar. Couldn't find it nowhar, and so I had to kick for Mrs. Tanner. Howsomever I guess it was the opedeldock, fur there lay the key all right on the table this mornin'."

The justice looked at him with some interest.

"How late was this?"

"I never keep late hours, judge. I don't s'pose it was wuss nor ten."

"How late was it, Mrs. Tanner?"

"After eleven," she weepingly responded.

Mr. Tanner cast an angry glance at her for daring to impugn his testimony.

"I don't b'lieve it was wuss nor ten," he reiterated. "I'm a keerful father of a family, judge."

"Where were you till this hour?" asked the justice.

"Why, now you speak of it, judge. I did stop in at Micky Flynn's fur a glass of ale. And sich ridik'lus powerul ale you never see'd as Micky keeps. It'd give a mule the blind staggers."

"I see. You came home drunk. Was there anybody with you? Or were you drinking with anybody at the rum-shop?"

"Excuse me, judge. I consider Micky's a highly 'spectable saloon, or I wouldn't go thar. And I allers inbibes by myself. I'd be ashamed to keep bad company, yer honor."

"Did your son come in later than you?"

"Blest if I know. I didn't see him."

"What time did he come in, Mrs. Tanner?"

"At—at twelve o'clock, sir," answered the weeping woman.

"Are you sure of that?" queried the detective.

"Did you hear it strike twelve?"

Mrs. Tanner was silent, with her handkerchief to her eyes.

"Please answer," said the justice, in a kindly tone. "Did you hear twelve strike?"

"I—I heard—I only heard three, sir. But—but Frank said it was twelve. I didn't hear the rest of it." Her voice quavered so she could scarcely speak.

The justice shook his head doubtfully. Matters

were certainly looking black for Frank. He reflected for a few moments. He then lifted a packet of goods which lay before him.

"Are you familiar with this article, Mr. Sharp?" he asked the detective.

"Yes. I brought it here."

"Where did you obtain it?"

"From under a cot bedstead in Mr. Tanner's rooms, which I understand was the sleeping-place of the prisoner."

"Do you recognize it?" He passed it down to the members of the firm.

They examined it closely, particularly investigating the marks upon the covering. All present waited in breathless interest for their answer.

"It is part of the stolen goods," announced Mr. Thompson gravely.

"Are you sure of that?"

"We cannot be mistaken."

"That will do, gentlemen. I must commit Frank Tanner, the prisoner at the bar, to answer the charge of burglary. The hearing is ended."

Poor Frank sunk nervelessly into a chair, and covered his face with his hands. His nerves had been strained to their utmost tension, and a natural revulsion now overcame him. A dreadful vision of the penitentiary opened out before his eyes.

Mrs. Tanner broke out into a loud wail of grief. She threw her arms around Frank's neck, and could hardly be removed by the efforts of her husband.

Mr. Clark, who had remained stolidly silent throughout the examination, now approached the distressed boy, and whispered in his ear:

"Keep up your spirits, my boy. I don't believe you had any more to do with this burglary than myself. You are the victim of a plot, and I have a suspicion of who is at the bottom of it. That bad brother—"

"Oh!" exclaimed Frank in horror. "You don't think— Oh! sir, Tom would never—Tom's wild, sir, but I'm sure he's not bad at heart."

"Very well," answered Mr. Clark, with an assuring smile. "At any rate I will look into this matter more closely."

Meanwhile Mrs. Tanner was being removed from the court. The detective, Mr. Sharp, lent his aid to the husband to support the distressed woman.

"Don't you be in such a stew, wife," said Mr. Tanner soothingly. "Frank'll swim through all right, you see. Frank's solid, right through. If it was that young villain Tom, now—"

"Who's Tom?" asked the detective hastily.

"Tom? Why, he's my other son."

"Your other? I thought you had only the one."

"I never have much to say 'bout Tom, 'cause he's kicked adrift. He's a little scapegrace as is rowin' his own canoe."

Mr. Sharp asked no more questions, but a light came into his eyes. Had he caught the end of a new thread?

CHAPTER XII.

MR. SHARP ON THE SCENT.

We are again in the office of Thompson, Clark & Co. Only two persons are present, Mr. Clark and the detective, Mr. Sharp. There is an earnest look upon the merchant's face as he addresses himself gravely to the officer.

"Between you and me, I am inclined to think that Frank is innocent of that crime. It looks decidedly as if there was a plot to injure him."

The officer shook his head.

"You have too much trust in human nature," he remarked. "And besides, who would get up such a plot to injure a boy like this?"

"I don't know. But if Frank is not honest then I am badly deceived. And it may not have been an intention to injure him, but to screen the real robbers by laying the blame upon him."

"There is more reason in that," admitted Mr. Sharp. "I have had that notion myself."

"Well, then, I want you to work it up on that line. Look up the whole affair. You have some suspicion about old Tanner's movements. Investigate them. And try and discover if the boy was really at the theater that night."

"I will," answered Mr. Sharp. "And I hope to find that rascally brother of the lad. It might be that he had a hand in this pie."

"I would give something to have Frank proved innocent," responded the merchant. "Do your best, Mr. Sharp. If you succeed it will be worth your while."

Mr. Sharp took his hat. Their business was over, and he was a man of action, and not disposed to waste words.

It was not many minutes afterward when he entered the establishment of Micky Flynn, that gentleman of Milesian descent whom Mr. Tanner patronized.

There were but two or three of his ordinary customers present, and Mr. Sharp entered into a quiet conversation with the proprietor, in reference to the movements of Mr. Tanner.

"Not the one of me knows," exclaimed Micky, a little angrily. "I've got to 'tend to my bar, and sorry I'd be to be nosin' round my customers. Jacob Tanner's a dacent man enough. And he pays fur his drink on the nail, or he goes dry. That's my tactics."

"That's a clever way of doing business," laughed Mr. Sharp. "Yes, I'll try some of your oldest ale. —That's got a fine bead on it," as Micky brought a foaming glass. "I like a prime old malt, and I fancy you've got it there."

"Ye can well say that," answered the pleased proprietor. "You'll not find the like of that brewin' at every hand's turn, I promise ye."

Mr. Sharp dallied over his ale.

"You don't remember, then, about Jacob Tanner on that evening? I was curious, for a certain reason, to know if any one was with him."

"Now you spake of it, it's comin' till me as there was. A good lump of a boy. And betune you and me he drank whisky like a fish drinks water. I dunno who the hard-headed little shrimp was, but he must ha' been weaned on Tipperary potheen."

"You don't know him?" exclaimed a tall, raw-boned fellow, who sat at a neighboring table. "Then by the beard of a Jersey oyster, I do! Why, he's just the juiciest little hound as ever rubbed out shoe-leather on brick pavements. Didn't I hire him in my oyster-cellar once, and the bullet-headed sand-snipe served me out by sendin' rotten oysters to my best customer? The primeest Blue-P'ints ain't no temptation to her since."

And Fred Jones the oyster dealer, for it was he, rounded off his remarks by an oath of the very saltiest fragrance.

"Will ye tell the gentleman who the lad was?" queried Micky. "All I know of him is that he had nickel-plated innards."

"It was Tom Tanner," answered Fred, with another oath. "It was old Tanner's young hopeful, blast his topknot! I thought at first he was goin' to be serviceable, and eat all the spiled oysters hisself; but when he begun feedin' my customers on 'em I giv him a neat little hint that we'd best dissolve partnership. Ain't set eyes on the little blue-nose shark since, afore t'other night."

Mr. Sharp finished his ale.

"And they left here together—about what hour?" he inquired.

"Som'at after eleven, I consider. Old Jake was a trifle overcome, and the boy was helpin' him. I know it, fur I pegged out just behind them."

Mr. Sharp felt that he had gained some important information. All this, in connection with old Tanner's loss of his key, and his finding it the next morning on a table, instead of in its usual place in his pocket, began to point suspicion in another direction. It was desirable to gain information about Tom Tanner's habits and associates. To suspect him was only half the battle. To find him was equally necessary.

Mr. Sharp set inquiries on foot in the tenement-house in which the Tanners occupied apartments, and also among the boys in the vicinity. He succeeded in learning the social status of the two boys, Frank being voted honest, intelligent and industrious, and Tom an unmitigated young rascal, without an ounce of good in his composition. This was satisfactory so far as it went, but it threw no light upon the present residence of the scapegrace. Where is he to be found, became the question.

Mr. Sharp's next move was to visit Frank in prison. It was possible that he might know something about Tom's whereabouts. He found the unlucky boy in a clean but very contracted cell, and in a decidedly gloomy state of mind. He was resting with his head on his hand, and hardly lifted his face to view his visitor.

Frank was so young, active and energetic, that confinement bore on him quite as hardly as the charge against him.

"Well, my boy, how do you feel?" asked the officer.

"As if I'd like to be out of this," answered Frank, gloomily.

"I've no doubt of that," was the cheery answer. "But don't get down-hearted, Frank. We'll bring you out all right, yet."

Frank lifted his head quickly.

"Oh, Mr. Sharp! You don't believe I'm guilty then? You don't believe I did it?"

"No, Frank. I think you are innocent."

"Oh, thank you, sir! And I hope Mr. Thompson and Mr. Clark ain't much down on me. I can't bear that they should think I would steal from them."

"They don't, my lad. They are in your favor."

"Well, that's good news anyhow," said Frank, lifting up his head with a bright flash in his eyes. "They've been so good to me that it hurts me more than anything to have them think I could do such a thing."

Mr. Sharp had helped himself to a chair, the only one in the cell. Frank was seated on the side of his cot.

"By the way, Frank," asked Mr. Sharp, suddenly. "I would like to know something about your runaway brother. Do you have any idea where he is?"

This was asked in an off-handed manner, but Frank looked up with quick apprehension.

"Why, no," he answered. "I don't know where Tom is. Why, what do you want to know that for?"

"For information," answered the officer, with a laugh.

"But you don't think that Tom had anything to do with it?" cried Frank, in alarm. "Oh, no, sir, you don't know Tom. He's been a pretty wild boy, I know, but he's not so bad as that. Tom's just like all the boys, Mr. Sharp. It's only mischief that makes him play tricks. He's not such a bad boy."

"Not if he is anything like you," replied Mr. Sharp, looking with much interest at the ingenuous face of the lad. "But I didn't say that I suspected him. I only asked if you knew where he was."

"No, sir. I haven't seen nor heard from him for a year. I wish I did, for I'm afraid he might get into trouble—that is, I mean, he might get into misery and hunger."

"Don't fear that," was the confident reply. "I fancy he will take care of that."

"But I hope you won't think he's been doing wrong. I'd rather go to prison myself than have anything happen to poor Tom."

The boy's voice was full of pleading. He evidently had a very soft spot in his heart for his dissolute

brother. Mr. Sharp continued to look at him musingly.

"Mr. Parsons denies being at the theater that night," he remarked, with a change of the topic of conversation.

"But he was there," Frank confidently answered. "I don't see what makes him deny it. I know I wasn't mistaken."

"Has he anything against you? Would he be likely to wish you harm?"

"I have never done anything to him," answered Frank, indignantly. "Mr. Parsons is very overbearing, and maybe I've answered him too quick sometimes. When a fellow is doing the best he knows how, he don't like to be put upon, you know."

Mr. Sharp smiled at Frank's remark. He began to see through the difficulty.

"Was Mr. Parsons alone at the theater?" he asked.

"No, sir. He was talking to a gentleman when I passed him. It was a man that looked very much like him, too. Might have been his brother, only I think he hasn't got any."

Mr. Sharp's conversation with the youthful prisoner lasted for several minutes longer. At the end of that time he left the prison with some new ideas about the case, but without much new information.

But the statement that Mr. Parsons had been seen talking at the theater with a gentleman closely resembling him was important. It was worth working up, and Mr. Sharp made it his first business to institute inquiries about this doubtful personage.

He soon found that there was such a person in existence; not a brother, but a first cousin of Mr. Parsons, and closely resembling him in feature. His next point was to see this gentleman.

Mr. Sharp was spending a good deal of time on the investigation of this case. The day was waning, but he did not feel that his labor had been without its reward. Though the weight of evidence had not been taken from Frank's shoulders, it had been lightened. An hour or two more was occupied in looking up Mr. Williams, the cousin of Mr. Parsons. But he was at length found and the detective proceeded rather bluntly to business.

"Excuse me for asking you," he said. "But were not you and your cousin, Mr. Parsons, at Wallack's theater together on Thursday night?"

The person addressed lifted his eyes in surprise at this question.

"No, sir," he replied.

Mr. Sharp was somewhat taken aback. Had Parsons warned his cousin?

"That is all I wished to know. I am obliged," remarked the officer, turning away for a moment's thought.

"Why do you ask me that?" queried Mr. Williams curiously. "We were at the Winter Garden, not at Wallack's. We stopped a few minutes in the vestibule at Wallack's, but concluded not to go in. Why do you ask?"

"At what hour was that?" asked Mr. Sharp quickly.

"About half-past seven."

"Thanks," was the officer's reply. "It's a joke of our friend Parsons, I guess. Some one said he saw him at Wallack's, and he denied being there. I volunteered to find out. A very neat sell for Parsons. Good-day, sir."

"Good-day," answered Mr. Williams, laughing at the cuteness of his cousin.

"The plot is thickening," commented the detective, as he walked away. "Parsons wanted to injure the boy, that's clear. Let him look out that his gun don't kick and hurt himself worse than his victim. So far, so good. But I've got one more job to put through to-day."

This job, however, was one not to be done in a moment. It consisted in visiting the various "fences," or receivers of stolen goods, to see if he could discover any indications of the "placing" of the proceeds of the late burglary.

This was a dubious mission. Probably a search would be needed ere he could discover if the lost goods had become part and parcel of the stock in trade of any of these shady gentlemen.

But there were several of them who had much reason to be afraid of Mr. Sharp, and who would be more likely to acknowledge possession of the goods, and play the honest dodge, than expose themselves to the risk of a search.

Two or three of these personages were visited that afternoon, without favorable results. The next morning Mr. Sharp resumed his round.

The last of these gentlemen visited was a personage of the name of Nathans, who kept a very quietly conducted, but very much suspected pawnbroker's shop.

This individual answered Mr. Sharp's inquiries with the same protestations which had been used by his brothers in the trade.

"I drive an honest business, Mr. Sharp, and you know that," he protested. "I wouldn't touch shady goods for a fortune."

"Except that sometimes you get taken in, friend Nathans," remarked Mr. Sharp, with a knowing wink. "As in that Brammerly affair, for instance."

"Why such things will happen," volubly cried the broker. "Shady goods look very much like safe goods, Mr. Sharp. How is a gentleman in business always going to know? If he pays a fair price for goods he is never sure what he's buying."

"But shady folks don't look so much like safe folks," was the answer. "Come, come, Nathans, that won't wash. You know a thief by sight. And half of the night workers in the town are acquaintances of yours."

"No, no!" declared the broker. "I give up telling a thief from an honest man nowadays. Can't tell a wolf in sheep's clothing. I don't do business with

shady characters. Why there was a chap in here two days ago; a mere boy; wanting to put some goods. The moment I set eyes on him I said to myself, 'No, no, my lad. I'll have naught to do with you. I don't like the cut of your jib.' So I sent him away with a flea in his ear."

"Aha!" exclaimed the officer. "Who was this youth?"

"Never saw him before. He is not your game, eh?"

"I can't answer for that. What sort of a looking chap was it?"

"A very peculiar young vagrant, I promise you. He looked like one of these dwarfs with a man's shoulders. He had a turned-up nose and red hair, and squeezed up little eyes, as sharp as needles. He was dressed in a man's overcoat, that came down to his heels and fairly swallowed him up. An interesting little hound, and ready for any rascality, I warrant. Do you recognize the picture, Mr. Sharp?"

"Hardly," was the answer.

The officer asked a few more questions, and then left the place, his face lighting up when he got outside.

"Do I know him? Well, I should think so," he said to himself gleefully. "Bandy Ben, as sure as shooting. It is worth something to get a hold on that shrewd young thief, who has baffled me for a year. The skies are growing clearer for Frank Tanner. The next point now is to trace the haunts of Bandy Ben."

CHAPTER XIII.

SPRINGING THE TRAP.

"BANDY BEN? Do I know him? Well, I should think so." And the patrolman of the police force laughed at the thought of how well he knew this young gentleman. "I've been watching the shrewd little rat like a hawk watches a hen. But he's too cunning; I can't catch him tripping."

"Do you know his hiding place?" asked Mr. Sharp.

"That's what I am after."

The patrolman shook his head.

"I'll tell you what, though," he suddenly exclaimed, "there's one of Bandy's gang now. That tall young coon with the battered beaver. Toppy Jim is the pretty name he goes by. He's not very sharp. You can track him if you're wide awake."

Mr. Sharp at once put himself on the trail of the youth with the odd nick-name, in the hope that he would be led to the lurking place of the gang of young thieves.

But we will go ahead of him, and pay a visit to the place which he was so anxious to discover, the domicile of Bandy Ben and his accomplices.

They were night birds, and were very apt to be at home during the day. With the exception of Toppy Jim we find them all there, enjoying life in their usual fashion, with pipe, whisky bottle and cards.

Bandy himself was stretched on the floor, with his heels on a chair, smoking a well colored meerschaum which seemed a new acquisition. It had, in fact, been "conveyed" from some gentleman's pocket the night before, by one of the gang, and won at cards that morning by Bandy, in his usual fashion of investing the earnings of his associates.

"It's a mighty 'ristocratic bit of brierwood," remarked Bandy to his victim, with a cunning leer. "And smokes to a charm. Pity you didn't color it a few, 'fore you put it up on the papers. But keep up yer spirits, Tim. I'll gin ye a smell now and then."

The teasing fellow sent a cloud of smoke curling toward his discontented victim.

"Dry up!" growled the latter, "or I'll bu'st that there old pipe into smithereens. You're a smart coon, Bandy, but I don't want you to be rubbin' it into me. It's enough to cheat a chap out of his pipe without throwin' it up to me."

"Who cheated you out of your pipe, you blamed pile-driver?" roars Bandy, with sudden anger.

"You did. You put up the cards on me."

"You lie, blast you! Here's your pipe."

In an instant the meerschaum was flying across the room. It took the venturesome youth in the temple, and sent him and his chair rolling to the floor.

"Smoke that!" cried the belligerent leader. "If you want any more I'm yer boss."

Evidently the fallen youth did not want any more. He gathered himself up and withdrew to a side of the room, growling out in a low tone vague threats of vengeance.

"Anybody else want the r' rations?" queried Bandy. "Jist say the word, fur I don't want to git up fer nothin'. All serene, hey? Well, jist hand me my pipe, Tom."

Tom kicked the pipe across the floor to his lazy associate. He was not inclined to take up the battle of the ill-treated boy, but there was a feeling of rebellion in his mind at Bandy's tyranny.

"That's a blamed perlit way of handin' a gentleman his pipe," growled the autocrat. "See yere, Tom Tanner, if ye come hoccassin' me ye'll find ye're barkin' up the wrong tree. I ain't no slouch fur you to wipe yer feet on. Hand me a match now, and sudden too. I'm goin' to see who's boss yereaway."

Tom very docilely provided the bully with a match. It was not advisable just then to kick against his authority. Grumbling like a partly pacified lion, Bandy relit his pipe and commenced to again send the smoke of peace curling through the room.

"See here, Bandy," asked another of the party, "when are you goin' to spring the plant? It mought be resky to leave the plunder round here too long. And if there's money in it I want to see the color."

"Ye want to git a stretch under the screw," growled Bandy. "And mebbe git us all nipped. Jist hold yer hosses. I'm a-workin' this plant. Wait till Toppy Jim comes in, and I'll post you on the lay. Stir up that stove, Joe, it's howlin' cold yere."

"How does the world kick with you, Tom?" asked Sandy, addressing Tom Tanner, whose face had a very sour look. "They say that nice brother of yours is pinched, and as he'll git five years fur our job. It's a rascally shame, I take it."

"Stop yer buzzin', Sandy," cried Tom, angrily. "I hate the stuck-up little rascal like I hate pizen. I said a year ago, when he got me kicked out o' doors, as I'd be even with him, and I'm bound to be. It'd jist do me good to have him sent to the Island fur five years, and then let him know it's me he's got to thank. The little 'ristocratic fool, I said I'd salt him, and I'm bound to do it."

"He might salt you if you let him into the game."

"Him? He ain't got the spirit. Why, I b'lieve he'd stand on his head fer me to-morrow. He's jist that kind of a coon. But I don't keer a jig for that. I hate him and I'm goin' to git even with him, you bet."

They were interrupted by the entrance of Toppy Jim, who walked in with the upright attitude and set-back shoulders from which he got his title.

His appearance was the signal for a movement among the boys.

"Hillo, Toppy! Where in the thunder have you been makin' street yarn? We've been waitin' for you to hold a council of war. Bandy's lined out a fence, and we've got to spring the plunder."

"That's prime," ejaculated Toppy, as he poured out a deep measure of rye whisky. "It's shiverin' cold outside, and I want to warm my toes. Here's luck, and may our uncle bleed kindly."

He swallowed the strong tippie as if it was so much water, and set down the glass with a sigh of satisfaction. A conversation ensued as to the best method of disposing of the proceeds of the robbery.

"I wouldn't trust old Nathans fur nothin'," remarked Bandy at length. "He's too weak in the gills. But I've got a man spotted. He's a prime fence as'll take it down like Toppy jist took down that red-eye."

"Who is he?" asked Tom, curiously.

"Don't ax too many questions," retorted Bandy. "Names has to be kept shady."

"Where is he then?"

"Here."

It was not Bandy that answered, but a deep-toned man's voice. All eyes turned in affright to the door, where stood a stout, resolute-looking man, with other forms in the background behind him.

The discovered thieves sprung in alarm to their feet. Bandy leaped from his recumbent attitude and faced the interloper with a look of fury on his face.

"Who the blazes are you? Git out of this, now. We rent this room, and won't have nobody here we don't ax."

"Don't get on your ear," replied the man, easily. "I'm only a fence, you see. Come to take up that plant and pay you for your industry."

"I'll pay you, dang you!"

Before Mr. Sharp, for it was he, could defend himself, the strong and desolate young reprobate struck him a fierce blow with a loaded cane, which he suddenly produced from behind him. The detective fell like a log and Bandy on him.

"Hurry up, lads!" he shouted. "Stir up the fire. The room's cold. I'll take keer of this pigeon."

There was a hidden meaning in his words. In an instant the boys had flung open a chest, and were quickly extracting packages of dry goods, which one of them prepared to force into the stove. It was evidently their intention to destroy the evidence against them by burning the proceeds of their burglary.

But they had noticed the companions of the detectives. Mr. Sharp was hampered by his antagonist, but two other men now rushed in and assailed the boys.

They fought with the activity and fierceness of cornered rats, and two of them had to be floored by policemen's clubs before they would yield. But they were no match for their powerful antagonists, and were soon handcuffed and helpless.

Not till all the others had been secured was Mr. Sharp released from his dwarfish but powerful assailant. The detective had been partly stunned by the blow, and was only slowly recovering when the other officers came to his assistance.

But Bandy was too wide awake to be easily trapped. He had not failed to notice the fate of his associates, and on the approach of the policemen he sprung alertly to his feet, tearing off his great coat as he did so. With a sudden swish he flung this in the eyes of the officers, and instantly darted through the door. Before they could recover sufficiently to pursue him he was leaping down the stairs, three at a time. The door of the house slammed behind him just as the officers reached the head of the stairs.

One of them continued the pursuit, while the other returned to Mr. Sharp, who had just regained his feet.

"A pestilent nest of young reptiles!" he growled. "It's a jolly find, Burke. If Harry only nails the one that escaped we will have all the rats in our trap. And here's the plunder. It's the Thompson & Clark job, sure enough. And the desperate rogues were going to burn the stuff. It's lucky we took them at short notice."

The boy prisoners lay on the floor, gloomy and defiant. One or two of them showed signs of fear, but the others were reckless and cool. Toppy Jim broke into a lively whistle of defiance. The young villain seemed to fancy that he had achieved great distinction.

"Whistle away, my lads. We'll take some of the splint out of you before we're through. Which of you is Tom Tanner?"

The boys looked at one another, but made no answer.

"All right," continued Mr. Sharp. "He can keep quiet if he wants. He carries his name on his face. So, my lad, this is a brotherly trick of yours. You thought you would send your brother to the penitentiary, then? I fear you will find that the way of the transgressor is hard. Rascality never pays in the long run, as you're likely to find."

"Burn yer preachin'," retorted the unyielding ingrate. "Don't be tiffin' them in my face. I hate the whole set of them, and I hate Frank wuss than all. The little rat jist worked me out of a case and home, and got me into this. I swore then I'd be even with him, and I would, only fur your blamed meddlin'. But my turn'll come yit. See if I can't pay him out."

"Hold your tongue, you graceless wretch!" exclaimed the officer sternly. "Here he is trying to screen you, and willing to take your punishment on himself to save you; and this is all the thanks he gets for it. He is paid enough, in having such an ingrate for a brother."

Tom relapsed into silence and thoughtfulness. The words of the detective seemed to have some strong effect upon him. Had they awakened a sense of remorse in his heart?

At this moment the other officer returned, bringing Bandy Ben with him, firmly handcuffed. Mr. Sharp started up with satisfaction.

"So you caught him, eh? That's good news. He is the ringleader of the whole gang. I have had my eye on you, Bandy. You were too keen for me, but you've put your foot in it this time. You were too ambitious, my chap. You had best have kept to safer lays."

"That be fiddled!" roared Bandy recklessly. "I don't keer a fig. Only some of these hounds has sold me you'd never cotched Bandy Ben. It's that milk-sop of a Tom Tanner, I s'pose."

"You lie!" roared Tom. "You made a thief of me, Bandy, and now this is my thanks. But ye're a liar to the back-bone if you say I sold the pass. I ain't that kind."

"All right, Tom," replied Bandy. "I don't believe you are. I take it back. But ther's a traitor somewhere in the camp."

"It was you, then," rejoined Mr. Sharp. "Your efforts to dispose of these goods put us on your track."

Bandy became suddenly silent. He felt convicted of a lack of shrewdness, which to him was the greatest of human weaknesses.

But we must end this scene. The young burglars were conveyed to the Tombs, from which Frank Tanner was at the same time released.

Mr. Thompson inspected the recovered goods, and at once decided that they were those which had been stolen from the firm of which he formed a member. The whole tale of the lost goods was there, with the exception of one package, this being the one that had been discovered under Frank Tanner's bed.

There was one other event of some interest, which took place at a later hour that day.

Mr. Parsons was called into the office of Thompson Clark & Co.

"You are still sure you were not at Wallack's theater, on the night of the burglary?" asked Mr. Clark.

"Yes, sir," answered Mr. Parsons, paling a little.

"Did you not stop there, with your cousin, on your way to the Winter Garden?"

Mr. Parsons hesitated, and grew paler.

"Why, yes, sir, we stopped there for a minute or two. But we did not go in."

"And why did you not admit this, when the boy claimed to have seen you there?"

"Because—I thought he meant inside. And I was not inside, sir. We only stopped in the vestibule."

"That subterfuge will not do, sir," replied Mr. Clark sternly. "You intended to injure the boy, that is very plain. Happily your villainy has turned upon yourself. You may go, sir. You are no longer in our employment."

CHAPTER XIV.

WHAT CAME OF IT ALL.

THE phrase "railroading" is a very expressive mode of describing the modern way of dealing with small criminals. Great rogues are sent to the penitentiary by stage, and a very slow stage at that, which has a bad habit of breaking down on the journey. But small ones are sent there by railroad express, without any stopping at way stations.

Such was the mode of dealing with Bandy Ben and his gang. They were railroaded to the penitentiary.

The most of them were well known to the police. Tom Tanner was one of their latest acquisitions, but had contrived, during his year's apprenticeship, to make his face familiar to the guardians of the law. As for Bandy Ben he was too singular a figure not to be known to them all. But he had so shrewdly made his youthful confederate do his work as to leave no opening for the authorities. They were satisfied that he was a thief, but were unable to convict him of theft.

It was with satisfaction, then, that they felt that they had at last nailed this cunning young rascal. The evidence of the robbery was undeniable. Not only had the stolen goods been found in possession of the gang of boy burglars, but other inmates of the house testified to the late entrance of the boys on the night of the robbery, apparently carrying some heavy packages.

Efforts were also made to trace other points in connection with the robbery, particularly that concerning Frank Tanner's connection with it. Old Tanner was put upon the stand.

"He's my son, judge," testified the old fellow, rubbing his eyes as if he wished them to look watery. "The boy's my son, but betune you and me, he's jest the royalest young devil's imp as ever kicked ag'in' his own daddy. So I wipe my hands clean of him."

"Keep to the questions," remarked the judge curtly. "And address your remarks to the jury."

"All right, yer honor. I'm agreeable. Let the legal gentleman pitch ahead with his remarks. I'm goin' to let out the whole job."

Jacob Tanner had evidently primed himself for the occasion.

"Go on," said the lawyer, "and tell in your own way where you were, and what happened to you, on the night of the 15th."

"Gentlemen of the jury, on that there night I was down to Micky Flynn's, a gentleman as I sometimes visits. He keeps a very 'spectable hotel for the 'commodation of man and beast, at 97 Small street. It was mebbe 'bout ten o'clock that night when I was settin' there by myself thinkin', 'cording to a way I have."

"What were you thinking of?" asked the lawyer.

"I dunno as that's to the p'int. Howsomdever, I'm under oath I s'pose. I was lookin' into an empty tumbler, and thinkin' how I was goin' to git it filled, without no credit. I could see the bottom of the tumbler considerable too easy; but I couldn't see the bottom of the diffikilty."

There was a slight laugh in the court-room at this, which was sternly repressed by the criers.

"Jist then," continued the witness, "in bolts my boy Tom, and orders whisky. I s'pose I outer ordered him out; but he teched my weak p'int, gentlemen, and I guv way. Well, we sot there maybe an hour, maybe less. I can't say as I punished much whisky, but it was powerful smellin' stuff, and it somehow got into my intelleck and upshot me."

"Go on," commanded the lawyer, as the witness paused.

"Ther ain't much more. That little varmint was very kind to take me home, for I was a trifle on-steady. But I'm despret afear'd he went through my pockets, gentlemen of the jury, for when I come to the door of my domicile there weren't no key to be found, and I had to kick up Mrs. Tanner."

"Kick up Mrs. Tanner?" exclaimed the lawyer, in surprise.

"Figuratively, your honor. I kicked at the door and she come. She asked me somethin' 'bout the key, but it wasn't thar. That's all I know 'bout it, judge; 'cept that, the next mornin', there lay the identical key on the table, where I'll swear on a stack of hymn books I never put it."

A few more questions to Mr. Tanner, and then he gave way to his wife, who confirmed the concluding points of his evidence.

Frank Tanner was next put upon the stand. The boy was evidently greatly troubled in mind. His face was pale, and there was a suspicious red look about his eyes. He could say little in regard to the case against Tom. The key was in his pocket when he came home from the theater, and he found it there the next morning. As to the package found under his bed, he was utterly ignorant how it got there. He slept soundly, and the house might have been entered a dozen times without his hearing it.

When questioned as to Tom's general character and behavior Frank was very little disposed to answer.

"He was a bit wild," he testified. "But all the boys were that, and I don't know that Tom was worse than the rest. I always liked Tom, and I never thought he could do anything bad."

"But did he not treat you very shabbily sometimes? Get into trouble and leave you to fight it out for him?"

"Why, all the boys—" began Frank, with an evident dislike to the question.

"Do not answer," called out the opposing attorney. "That is a leading question, your honor," addressing the judge.

The debate on this point ended in Frank's escape from the witness stand, without further questioning, at which he was very glad. It was like pulling eye teeth with him to have to say anything against Tom.

We shall not follow the course of the trial further. It ended, as it was evident it would, in the conviction of the young criminals. They were sentenced to moderate terms of imprisonment by the judge, who read them a severe moral lesson on the fatal and degrading course of life upon which they were entering, and warned them that continuance in such a course would lead them to utter ruin and degradation.

This advice was differently received by the evil-disposed lads. Some of them appeared affected by it, but the others received it with an impudent bravado of manner, particularly Tom Tanner and Bandy Ben, who seemed to think it a point of honor that they should assume an aspect of impertinent defiance. They gained but one thing, however, by this disrespect of the judge's well-meant and useful advice, namely, two years of imprisonment more than was given to their penitent companions. It was very likely that, before their term was out, they would repent a few minutes' bravado so dearly paid for.

We have but little more to say for them. Our story is near its termination, and we must quickly dispose of our characters. As may well be imagined, Frank Tanner's position was doubly assured with Thompson, Clark & Co. by the peril which he had encountered in their service, and the proof of his sterling honesty.

They took, thenceforth, a personal interest in him,

increased his salary, and advanced him as rapidly as was desirable in the store. Nor was there any commission too important to trust to Frank's care, for they found that his judgment and business capacity were equal to his integrity.

But there was one point at which Frank put his foot firmly down. He would have nothing more to do with the key of the store. He had a private reason for this which he preferred not to mention, and this was that he distrusted his father. It was not his father's honesty, however, but his caution, that Frank feared. He had been fooled once through drink, and might be again, and it was best to put danger out of his way.

It is not easy to cure an old sore, and Jacob Tanner's love of strong drink was not overcome by the peril into which it had led his son. But he took to behaving much better than of old. In fact, he grew rather afraid of Frank, who was as firm as he was respectful in any domestic difficulty. He was, moreover, very proud of his son Frank, and had no word too severe for that rascal Tom.

"You needn't be standin' up for him, Frank," he said. "He's got bad blood in his veins. It didn't come from me, and I'd be sorry to say as it comes from his mother, 'cause the poor woman's long dead and gone. But it's thar, Frank, there's no goin' back on that. You'll find one thing, my boy, the longer you play the game of life, and this is it, that honesty's the right bower in the game. Jist you allers hold that for yer trump card, my son, and ye're bound to win. That rascal Tom thought he was goin' to sweep the pool with the left bower, which is rascality; but it didn't work; he lost the game. Honesty's a better trump card than rascality, Frank, jist you take that in. The right bower 'll allus beat the left, and jist you hang on to the best card, no matter who plays the next best."

There was very little danger but that Frank would follow this homely but shrewd advice. He saw plainly enough, young as he was, that honesty was the best policy, even if there were no better reasons for being honest, and he was not at all likely to let go that sheet anchor of life.

It was a year after the events here narrated that Frank got an opportunity to visit his brother in prison.

Despite Tom's crime and wickedness, Frank could not get rid of his old feeling of affection for him, and hoped that he might be able to influence him to pursue a different course of life.

But such hopes were vain. Tom was bitter and impenitent. Prison life, as it so often does, had made him harder and more evil disposed than ever; and he who had entered it as a boy criminal bade fair to leave it as a hardened wretch, fit for any deed of crime.

"Ther's no use for you to come here preachin', Frank Tanner," he bitterly remarked. "I've been made once, and bad made maybe, but I don't calculate to have you shape me over again. Jist you git now. I didn't send for you, and don't want you."

"But, Tom," pleaded Frank, with tears in his eyes, "just think what is before you. What can come of the life you are leading but ruin and misery? What the judge said is all true, and you know it, Tom. As father says, honesty is the right bower of life. You'd find it so if you'd only begin to play it."

"Yes, dad's mighty smart," cried Tom bitterly. "He was smart enough to git me in here. I don't want none of his drunken preachin'. I'll stick to the left bower, right through."

"Come, come, Tom, you are only putting this on. You are not a fool, and you know the difference between right and wrong. I'd give my right hand to save you from ruin. If you would only listen to me, Tom! If you would only listen to me!"

There was the ring of true feeling in his voice, and Tom, hardened as he was, could not help being affected by it. He looked earnestly at Frank, hesitated a moment and then cried out:

"That's true, old boy! I must give in that's true. Ye're made of sound timber, Frank, and you've stuck to me like wax. Ye're a fool for doin' it, for I've used you bad. But there's something solid in you, Frank, and hang me if I'll ever forgit it. And now be away with you. If you stay here longer ther'll only be more preachin', and I tell you now that's clean wasted. I've got the devil in me, Frank, and you can't preach it out."

Frank went away very sorrowfully, though he felt that something had been gained to make his erring brother display even that little show of penitence and human feeling.

But it went no further. Tom became more impenitent and hardened than ever. At the expiration of his term of imprisonment he went west, and joined a party of organized robbers in one of the Western cities.

What eventually befell him is not known, though there is reason to believe that he was stabbed by one of his villainous associates, in a drunken fight, and died a miserable death.

As for Frank he rapidly advanced in the employment of Thompson, Clark & Co., passing from one position of trust to another, until he became one of the most important persons in the establishment. He also took the opportunity to complete his somewhat neglected education, and to fit himself for the grade of society to which his position called him.

He finally married a daughter of Mr. Clark, and was admitted to partnership in the firm, of which he has long remained an honored member.

Thus in the life history of these two brothers, who chose such widely different paths in life, was fully exemplified the truth of the good old adage that "Honesty is the best policy."

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